

endangered by Gillian Stack



Wongan cactus

The genus *Daviesia* includes 135 species and subspecies, all of which occur only in Australia. More than 70 per cent of these are endemic to the south-west of Western Australia. They are short-lived shrubs, which typically set a lot of seed in a relatively short time. This seed persists in the soil for many years, and germinates in response to disturbance such as fire.

Wongan cactus (*Daviesia euphorbioides*) is a striking plant, with abundant, colourful flowers from June to July. Its cylindrical pithy branches and scattered, spiny 'leaves' give rise to its common name. The grey-blue branches of the Wongan cactus grow to 80 centimetres in height. The orange-yellow and deep red flowers cluster together along the stems.

Wongan cactus occurs from Wongan Hills to the Dowerin-

Goomalling area. There has been broadscale vegetation clearing for agriculture over the whole of its range, with only six per cent of vegetation remaining in the three shires in which this species occurs. Only some of this remnant vegetation is suitable habitat for Wongan cactus, which occurs on sandplains, in heath dominated by sheoak (*Allocasuarina campestris*) and sandplain cypress (*Actinostrobus arenarius*). There has been a reduction in the occurrence of fire associated with the settling of this area for agriculture, and this has reduced the ability of Wongan cactus to regenerate from seed.

The species is known from 107 mature individuals in 14 populations. Fifty-six plants occur in a single population on a nature reserve managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), but the remaining 51 occur in 13

different populations, mainly located on narrow road and rail reserves. These narrow reserves are typically highly degraded, and plants are vulnerable to road and rail maintenance, and weeds. Because of the low number of plants and severe ongoing threats, Wongan cactus is ranked as critically endangered.

An interim recovery plan has been prepared for this species, and the Merredin District Threatened Flora Recovery Team is coordinating actions that address threats to the survival of the species. The Natural Heritage Trust has provided funds to undertake recovery actions, including attempts to stimulate germination, and translocation of plants into a nature reserve, ensuring security of land tenure and support for good land management.

Photos by Steve Hopper

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