

endangered

by Mia Morley



Scott River Ironstone Association

Remarkable plant communities associated with restricted areas of massive ironstone occur in a number of areas in Western Australia's south-west, including the Scott River, Gingin and Busselton areas. These communities are among the State's most threatened and each is characterised by different plant species.

The Scott River Ironstone Association, an endangered ecological community, is confined to shallow soils over massive ironstone in the Scott Coastal Plain near Augusta. Many of the species in this heath and shrubland community have highly restricted distributions, can only reproduce from seed and are susceptible to *Phytophthora*-caused dieback. Five declared rare flora and 18 priority flora occur in the community, of which five are endemic to the area.

The community is variously

dominated by melaleucas, hakeas or kunzeas, and there are many occurrences of beautiful and diverse annual flora. The community composition varies as a result of different soil depths and types over the massive ironstone but it is usually found in areas with soil depths of up to half a metre and often where there are ironstone outcrops. This impermeable layer of ironstone results in the pooling of rainwater and, in combination with high groundwater levels that may reach the surface, causes waterlogging during winter. A suite of aquifers within sand or sandstone occur beneath the Scott River Ironstone Association. Shales, siltstones and clays occur between these aquifers and restrict the vertical and horizontal flow of water to varying degrees. The major aquifer of the Scott Coastal Plain is the south-west Yarragadee Formation.

The original extent of the community was about 1780 hectares of which only 325

hectares remain uncleared—an 82 per cent loss of the community's area, that was already highly restricted in distribution. The remaining areas are threatened primarily by dieback, grazing and changes in groundwater levels.

An interim recovery plan for the community outlines recovery actions such as mapping, prevention and treatment of dieback, fencing remnants, and monitoring water levels and quality. These actions are implemented by the South West Region Threatened Flora and Communities Recovery Team, the Bunbury Naturalists' Club and local authorities. It is hoped that what is left of this unique ecological community and the many rare flora it supports will be protected and conserved with the continued assistance of these organisations, local landholders, and other key stakeholders.

Photos by Mia Morley (main) and Janine Liddelow (Inserts)

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