

endangered

by Kelly Griffiths



Stylidium semaphorum

A member of the trigger plant family, *Stylidium semaphorum* is a small delicate plant 15 to 20 centimetres high. The small lance-shaped leaves, which are two to four millimetres long and 0.7 to 0.9 millimetres wide, are pressed to the stem and hairless. The tip of the leaf has a short, hard and flexible point, and the leaf margin is thin and translucent. The flower spike comprises attractive pink and white flowers, which usually appear between September and October. *Stylidium semaphorum* is distinguished from related species by its sepals which have a short brownish tip.

The species was described by Allen Lowrie and Kevin Kenneally in 1997 from a collection made by Allen in October 1993. The name *semaphorum* is derived from the Greek *sema* (sign) and *phoros* (bearing) and alludes to the signalling method of sending messages by semaphore, whereby a person holding a flag in each

hand angles the flags to represent different letters to relay a visual message. *Stylidium semaphorum* exhibits a similar trait. It displays its upper corolla lobes to signal its position in order to attract pollinators. Interestingly, the upper corolla lobes are also positioned in a V-shape which is the semaphore code for 'U' and 'attention'.

The first known collection of the species was made from a nature reserve north of Bindoon by Rica Erickson in October 1966. It is still only known from this one population, which consists of 118 plants on a hill summit in lateritic loam soil. Associated species include *Banksia dallanneyi*, *B. nivea*, *B. sessilis*, *Hakea undulata*, *H. trifurcata*, *Hibbertia hypericoides* and *Stylidium brunonianum*. Volunteers have conducted surveys near Bindoon but recorded no new populations. The species has deciduous leaves which die back to a rhizome during summer, making the plant very hard to find outside its flowering period.

Stylidium semaphorum's ranking of critically endangered places it at severe risk from a single threat. It is threatened by introduced weeds, while inappropriate fire regimes are a minor threat.

Different techniques such as fire and soil disturbance need to be investigated to determine if disturbance will stimulate germination, as is thought to be the case with other *Stylidium* species. However, until the ideal fire frequency for optimal response has been determined, fire should, where possible, be prevented from occurring in the area of the only known population.

The Department of Environment and Conservation's Swan Region Threatened Flora and Communities Recovery Team is overseeing the implementation of an interim recovery plan for the species. Recovery actions include further surveys, monitoring, seed collection, disturbance trials and weed control.

Photos by Jean Hort

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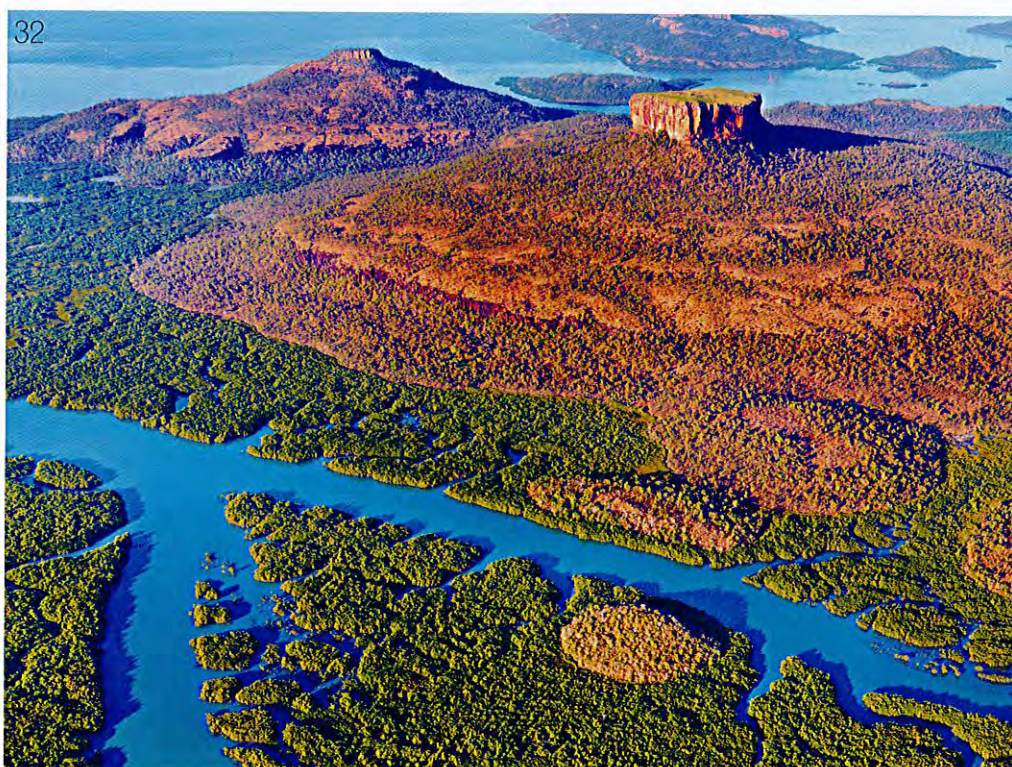
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