

# endangered

by Andrew Brown



## Milky emu bush

Milky emu bush (*Eremophila lactea*) is a member of the Scrophulariaceae family. It is a spindly shrub that grows to 3.5 metres tall with pale brown, more or less smooth bark and smooth, sessile, often-overlapping leaves 10 to 30 millimetres long by two to six millimetres wide. The tubular flowers are cream to pale lilac on the outside while inside they are deeper lilac with purple spots. Both the scientific and common names are derived from the milky substance which often appears on the leaves and branches. Flowering occurs between September and November.

Milky emu bush is similar to smooth-sepaled eremophila (*Eremophila psilocalyx*) but has broader leaves and smaller, glandular flowers with smaller sepals.

The first known collection of the species was made in 1967. Further collections were made in 1978 from the same general area. Despite being searched for over several seasons no new populations were found until 1997. Seven additional populations have since been located.

Milky emu bush is endemic to the Esperance–Salmon Gums area of Western Australia, where it grows in sandy-loam soils in *Eucalyptus* woodland with earth-loving eremophila (*Eremophila chamaephila*), stiff westringia (*Westringia rigida*) and red plume grevillea (*Grevillea plurijuga*).

Much remains unknown about the biology and ecology of milky emu bush; however, it does appear to be a disturbance opportunist as all known populations are in disturbed sites. Fire and mechanical disturbance trials aimed at stimulating the germination of soil-stored seed have shown positive responses, with around 400 seedlings appearing following trials in May 2007.

Under the WA *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* the species is declared as rare flora and ranked as critically endangered due to the fragmented nature of populations and a continuing decline of mature individual plants. It is listed as endangered under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The species is probably naturally rare, as it has only ever been recorded from a very small area of distribution. Only eight populations

are currently known, all of which are threatened by further clearing of remaining habitat. A lack of fire has resulted in little or no recruitment in most populations, as the species requires fire to germinate soil-stored seed.

The Department of Parks and Wildlife's (DPaW's) Esperance District Threatened Flora Recovery Team is overseeing the implementation of protective measures to ensure the long-term conservation of the species. An interim recovery plan has been prepared and recovery actions underway include fencing, further surveys, monitoring, fire and disturbance trials, seed collection and liaison with landowners and land managers.

It is possible that there are more populations of milky emu bush. If you think that you have found this species, please advise DPaW's Esperance District or Species and Communities Branch on (08) 9083 2100 or (08) 9334 055 respectively.

**Photos by Emma Adams (main) and Andrew Brown (inset)**



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