





A journey of colour

by Rob Davis

With nearly 10,000 species of flowering native plants, and new species being described all the time, Western Australia's south-west is an internationally renowned botanical hotspot. Just take a trip through this area from late-June to November for the magnificent and very colourful proof.

When most Western Australians think of wildflowers, they picture masses of everlastings spreading as far as the eye can see. However, the richness of WA's wildflowers extends well beyond this image. The south-west of the State is an internationally renowned botanical hotspot, rich in endemism, species numbers and floral diversity. It attracts international travellers, particularly from Europe and Asia, who specifically come to see our unique flora. And new species are still being discovered.

So when and where are the best places to go to experience these rich botanical treasures? In many places, some native plants will be flowering all year round, while in other places varying rainfall also dictates where the best flowers can be seen. Still, some general pointers can be given. The flowering season is influenced by temperature, so from June to August the warmer northern parts of the south-west are the best places to visit, while by October to November the southern coast is at its best. The

“The south-west of the State is an internationally renowned botanical hotspot, rich in endemism, species numbers and floral diversity.”



Previous page

Main Everlastings at proposed nature reserve Thundelarra Station.

Photo – Cliff Winfield

Left *Ptilotus macrocephalus*.

Photo – Rob Davis/Parks and Wildlife

Below Murchison wildflowers.

Photo – Samille Mitchell

Western Australian Herbarium's online resource *FloraBase* enables you to search botanical regions, flower colour and flowering times helping pinpoint what's flowering where and when.

AWASH WITH COLOUR

From late-June the State's Midwest region starts to come alive with colour. Head up to the Shark Bay area and you can expect to get an 'outback' or 'station country experience' with open Acacia scrublands, Eremophilas, everlastings

and *Ptilotus* (mulla mulla). As you get closer to Kalbarri, a variety of sand-plain species appear including Ashby's banksia (*Banksia ashbyi*), sceptre banksia (*Banksia sceptrum*), coppercups (*Pileanthus peduncularis*), prickly plume grevillea (*Grevillea annulifera*) and white-plume grevillea (*Grevillea leucopteris*).

A little way south, the Geraldton area has a wide range of botanical species to explore; just north of the city are prominent rocky mesas, which in late winter to early spring take on a slightly mauve appearance from the masses of *Thryptomene* species. Howathara Nature Reserve is particularly stunning in June–July with *Thryptomene baeckeacea*, *Melaleuca megacephala* and *Grevillea pinaster* in full flower.

Coalseam National Park south-east of Geraldton provides the station country experience without having to go remote. Here you'll find Acacia woodlands with masses of everlasting like pompom head (*Cephalopterum drummondii*) in early spring.

South of Geraldton, around Dongara, is a stunning coastal limestone flora, with the large-flowered lilac hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii*). South-east of there, Tomkins Road and Mt Adams provide an outstanding drive through Yardanogo Nature Reserve, taking in typical low heathlands with species like Hooker's banksia (*Banksia hookeriana*), *Geleznowia verrucosa*, granite boronia (*Boronia cymosa*) and hairy leschenaultia (*Lechenaultia hirsuta*).

Lesueur National Park is one of WA's premier floral destinations. It provides a



Wildflower hotspots

Mulla mulla. Photo – Andrew McInness



Black kangaroo paw. Photo – Marie Lochman



Everlastings. Photo – Andrew McInness



Common mountain bell. Photo – Babs and Bert Wells/Parks and Wildlife



Orange Morrison featherflower. Photo – Rob Davis/Parks and Wildlife



Pimelea ferruginea. Photo – Samille Mitchell



Shark Bay

June July August September October November

Coalseam Conservation Park

Lesueur National Park

Moore River National Park

Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park

Stirling Range National Park

Fitzgerald River National Park

Royal hakea. Photo – Parks and Wildlife



WIN a beautiful framed wildflower print

Enter for your chance to win a framed print of the stunning *Kunzea eriocalyx*. Exquisitely painted by Parks and Wildlife's own Gooitzen van der Meer (whose work also appears on page 27 and 54 of this issue) *Kunzea eriocalyx* occurs nowhere else in the world except three sites in Fitzgerald River National Park on the south coast of WA where it blooms between August and October.

To enter, simply send an email with your full name and address to landscape@dpaw.wa.gov.au with the subject line 'Wildflower competition'.

WIN!



Above Bushwalking in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park is a great way to experience wildflowers.

Photo – Samille Mitchell

Above right *Pileanthus peduncularis* ssp. *pilifer*, a coppercup.

Left *Rhodanthe chlorocephala* ssp. *splendida*.
Photos – Rob Davis/Parks and Wildlife

PERTH'S DOORSTEP

Some of the more spectacular displays of wildflowers can actually be found on Perth's doorstep. Studies have shown that the Darling Scarp east of Perth has flora comparable to many of the well-known botanical destinations in WA. One place worth a visit is John Forrest National Park during September to October. The granite outcrops are always fascinating to explore and it is a good spot for 'belly botany' – getting down to see an astonishing array of tiny herbs like triggerplants, sundews and daisies on show. The *Eucalyptus wandoo* woodland gives a wonderful display of colour and trunk texture, and though poor in the number of woody shrubs they have a myriad of small flowering herbs.

variety of habitats to visit with patches of woodland, lateritic hills and kwongan heathlands. On the lateritic hills you can expect to see species such as spider coneflower (*Isopogon adenanthoides*) or the unusual *Daviesia epiphyllum* with its flattened blue-grey stem from which large bright red pea flowers emerge. On shallow sandy soils look for black kangaroo paw (*Macropidia fuliginosa*), summer coppercups (*Pileanthus filifolius*) and *Verticordia ovalifolia* with its stunning feathery pink flowers.

In coastal areas just north of Perth, places like Nilgen Lookout on the Indian Ocean Drive in Nilgen Nature Reserve make ideal roadside stops, with a great representation of coastal heathlands characterised by species like *Diplolaena obovata*, *Grevillea preissii*, *Acacia truncata* and cockies tongues (*Templetonia retusa*).

Our very own Perth urban banksia woodlands have an outstanding array of plants. There are the familiar firewood banksia (*Banksia menziesii*) and slender banksia (*Banksia attenuata*), but one of the more spectacular displays happens in early summer when Morrison featherflower (*Verticordia nitens*) comes into full bloom. The best places to see this species is just north of Perth at Moore River National Park or Boonanarring Nature Reserve; good patches can even be seen in Whiteman Park.

FURTHER AFIELD

The south-west tip from Margaret River to Walpole gives the botanical enthusiast a broad range of habitats to explore. The Capes and Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park have great examples of coastal flora, with species such as *Pimelea ferruginea*, coral vine (*Kennedia coccinea*) and thick-leaved



fan-flower (*Scaevola crassifolia*). The majestic karri forests, while not especially rich in vascular plant species, are places to find species such as karri dampiera (*Dampiera hederacea*), tall kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos flavidus*) and karri boronia (*Boronia gracilipes*). For the real enthusiast, swamplands in this area have a great range of species many of which flower well into early summer, including the stand-out swamp bottlebrush (*Beaufortia sparsa*) with its fluorescent red flowers, along with many species of triggerplants, *Xyris* and sundews.

Further around the coast, Torndirrup National Park has a range of coastal limestone species as well as an interesting granite outcrop flora. Close by are the Porongurup and Stirling Range national parks, which contain numerous endemic

Above right The amazing royal hakeas at Fitzgerald River National Park.
Photo – Tourism WA

Right Fringed lily (*Thysanotus manglesianus*).
Photo – Rob Davis/Parks and Wildlife



species (see also 'Brightening the landscape: Stirling Range wattle' on page 11). The Stirling's Darwinias are probably the park's most iconic species. Away from the peaks, the sand-plains below have an incredible variety of species; in September look for a wide range of pea-shaped flowers from the genera *Chorizema*, *Gompholobium*, *Gastrolobium* and *Daviesia*.

The south coast jewel in the crown would have to be Fitzgerald River National Park. A declared World Network Biosphere Reserve, the park has more than 1500 species of flora, many of which are unique to the area. While September

has a fantastic display of wildflowers, the season extends well into October–November. The iconic plant for the park has to be the royal hakea (*Hakea victoria*); while the flowers are well hidden, it's the colours of the cup-shaped leaves which intrigue plant enthusiasts. The colouration happens because of the nutrient-poor soils.

So, whether you're planning a day out in Perth's surrounds, a trip further afield, venturing along the coast or into the outback, pick the right time of year and you'll be treated to magnificent wildflower displays. You might even come across something that hasn't yet been described.



Rob Davis is an identification botanist at the Western Australian Herbarium. He can be contacted on (08) 9219 9124 or by email (robert.davis@dpaw.wa.gov.au). The herbarium is part of an international network of botanical institutions and is responsible for documenting and understanding the diversity of WA's plants, algae and fungi. It has a number of functions including helping community, industry and researchers understand and identify plants, algae and fungi and contributing to taxonomic research.

One of Parks and Wildlife's best-loved Bush Book titles – Wildflowers of the South Coast – is back in print. This handy guide helps identify 46 wildflowers from Denmark to Esperance through easy-to-read descriptions and stunning photos. The area takes in the impressive Stirling Range, which houses more than 1500 species of which 80 are found nowhere else. It also includes Fitzgerald River National Park, which is an International Biosphere Reserve and has wonderfully rich flora, including a number of unusual species such as the royal hakea and Qualup bell. Like all Bush Books, Wildflowers of the South Coast is available for \$6.95 from Parks and Wildlife offices or from its online shop at shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au. Bush Books are also available from good bookshops and visitor centres.

