Rare Plant Discovery

MOGUMBER BELL

(Darwinea carnea)

A press release by the W.A. Herbarium early in 1978 revealed the re-discovery of the "Mogumber Bell" near Narrogin.

This species had not been sighted for many years and it was thought it might even be extinct. Its stronghold was once Mogumber, near New Norcia. There are now only six plants known in existence in the wild and these are found on a small stony ridge south of Narrogin.

A concerned conservationist, from Narrogin, told Dr. N. Marchant of the W.A. Herbarium of the plants' existence. Dr. Marchant has been successfully propagating the species from cuttings at the Herbarium.

The actual location of the plants is being kept a well-guarded secret.

A wildlife officer has since visited the area and saw the plant growing amongst *Dryandra nobilis* and *Beaufortia* on a small laterite ridge. The area was uncleared and had been fenced off to prevent the invasion of rabbits. The whole area only comprises of 0·5 ha and is completely surrounded by cleared cultivated land.

The "Mogumber Bell" is an extremely rare and endangered plant and it is vital to conserve the last known specimens as far as possible, in their natural habitat. Accordingly a project is underway to protect them and this is being supported whole-heartedly by the landowner.

FAT-TAILED DUNNART

(Sminthopsis crassicaudata)

Early in June 1979 Wildlife Officer R. Smith of Albany was called to a property at Ongerup, where a small marsupial mouse had been found.

The animal was identified as a Fat-tailed Dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*). It was found under mallee roots in a cleared paddock.

The owner of the property said that he often found these animals when working around the farm. It is interesting to note that the farm has been completely cleared for fifteen years, and the dunnarts' habitat appears to be the open paddocks where they live in the old mallee roots and stones.

Dr. W. D. L. Ride in his book *A Guide to the Native Mammals of Australia* (Oxford University Press; Melbourne 1970) describes the Fat-tailed Dunnart as a small active predator, the size of a domestic mouse, which appears to live principally on insects.

If a dunnart is frightened, it will adopt a threatening posture opening its mouth wide and often making strange noises as it exhales. This dunnart, as its name indicates, has a fat store in the tail. This suggests that these animals live in dry areas.

Studies have shown that female Fat-tailed Dunnarts may begin breeding when only four months old; and for at least six months after this, she will continue to produce litters at intervals of about 82 days providing she can find enough to eat.

Male animals will fight over females on heat and females, especially the older ones with young in their pouch, will attack males. They have even been known to kill their mates.

Dunnarts are extremely cautious animals, and will look with great suspicion at any new or strange object appearing in their territory. Like some possums, the dunnart uses glandular secretions and saliva as territorial signals.

In Western Australia the Fat-tailed Dunnart is found in a large area extending inland from the south-west.