ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF BIODIVERSITY

FIELD DAY ON PROFITABLE REVEGETATION WITH SANDALWOOD ATTRACTS INTEREST

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THERE is no doubt that landholders in the wheatbelt will respond to the need to revegetate if there is some prospect of a commercial return in the medium to long term. This was clearly demonstrated with the good turn out at a field day held around Gnowangerup and Borden in October 2001. The purpose of the day was to showcase field trials and new establishment methods which will encourage landholders to adopt the WA native sandalwood as a profitable revegetation option.

Interest was high with over 60 people attending from all over the south-west. Most were farmers but at least three commercial tree companies were also represented. Many of these people are already growing sandalwood on a smaller scale but the level of interest indicates that there will soon be some bigger plantings.

The day was sponsored by the NHT project *Sandalwood to protect biodiversity and sustainability* which is a joint initiative between the Gnowangerup LCDC and Department of Agriculture Albany Office staff, Chris Robinson and Geoff Woodall. This project is focusing on using a wide range of local species, direct seeded as host revegetation to support sandalwood. The range of species (mostly acacia, other legumes, sheoaks and hakeas) will have a significant nature conservation value and be more likely to sustain sandalwood over a longer period than a host monoculture. In the Pallinup River valley, which drains the country around Gnowangerup, remnant sandalwood trees parasitise a wide range of native legumes and some non-leguminous plants. This revegetation will link up numerous remnants and reserves along the valley.

One year old sandalwood on the right with haustorial attachment straight into its one year old jam host on the left.

The field day started with a mini-seminar and went on to inspect a number of field sites. The first was west of Gnowangerup, where sandalwood and hosts were germinating on site from 2001 direct seeding. A Chatfield tree planter had been used to scalp away the weed burden and prepare the sandy soil for host seeding at a rate of 500 gm per hectare. Additionally, some pregerminated sandalwood seeds had been planted with jam seedlings. The second site, just north of the Stirling Range, was an older host plantation of direct seeded jam established in 1998, now supporting about 200 sandalwood up to two years old.

The last site was of particular interest, as one year old plants established by the "one-pass" technique conceived by Geoff Woodall were inspected. This technique establishes a primary host jam seedling with a pre-germinated sandalwood seed, planted together over a direct seeded host mix in the one pass on the same day. The field day attendees were impressed with the exceptional growth of the one year old sandalwoods, each of which had been planted with a jam seedling as a germinating seed in July 2000. The young jams had been directly parasitised by the young sandalwood, which had sent a root with haustorial sucker straight into the main taproot of the jam. This technique speeds up establishment time of the parasitic sandalwood by at least one year.

The day concluded with a stroll through a large bush remnant which is now vigorously regenerating in the absence of sheep. The landholder has introduced more sandalwood into this remnant by direct seeding nuts adjacent to existing jam trees.

For further information on Sandalwood growing, contact Chris Robinson 9892 8486; Geoff Woodall, 9892 8427; or Jon Brand, 9334 0327