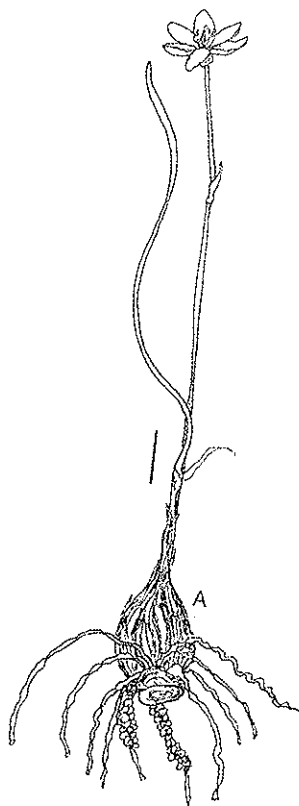


FLORA and FUNGI

To dogged bush regenerators trying to cope with an increasing tide of weeds, it sometimes seems as if everything with a corm or bulb must be introduced. But there are some native perennials with tubers, rhizomes, bulbs or corms, though they are not as prolific as Cape tulips or watsonias. Orchids are one such group, but there are many others, mostly inconspicuous except when in flower.

In winter and spring across the south-west, look for a flash of brilliant, shiny butter-yellow which advertises the flower of a graceful, delicate, tiny star, *Hypoxis* sp. They grow from corms and have slender stems and narrow leaves with solitary starry flowers, usually having either four or six perianth segments. Only occasionally, in favourable sites and excellent seasons, will they grow taller than 10 cm. Where to look for them? – well, everywhere that has an intact ground layer flora! Look in woodlands, limestone cliffs, granite swards or the damp margins of lakes (salt or fresh), as long as that low layer has not been swamped by weeds or eroded by disturbance. There are several south-west species, and a new one has just been reported*.



Hypoxis salina. Scale bar = 5mm

TINY STARS

Penny Hussey

Hypoxis salina was discovered during the wheatbelt biological survey. It grows on seasonally-wet sandy soils within natural saline areas, among thickets of *Melaleuca thyoides* (saltbuster, possibly the most salt-tolerant of all the melaleucas) but the tiny star probably relies on fresh water from rainfall. It can grow to 4 cm tall, but is often shorter. It flowers in spring. The flowers are small, less than 1 cm across, but obvious when open because of their bright yellow colour. Currently it is only known from the Lake Chinocup area, but it may be more widespread. Look for it this spring on natural salt lake systems near you (and please report back to your local herbarium or LFW Officer if you think you have found it).

Hypoxis is in the family Hypoxidaceae, a part of the larger lily group, Liliaceae. The family is quite widespread, occurring in America, Africa and East Asia as well as Australasia. *Hypoxis* itself occurs in South America, Africa, southern Asia, Australia and New Zealand. There are five species in the south-west of WA (all endemic) with another species in the Kimberley. There is also another genus in the Kimberley, *Curculigo*, also with starry yellow flowers. The corms of *C. ensifolia* are valued as bush tucker.

There are other genera with yellow lily-type flowers in the south-west, including weeds, but they are all more robust than tiny stars and so are unlikely to be confused with them.

* Lyons, M.N. and G.J. Keighery. 2007. A new species of *Hypoxis* (Hypoxidaceae) from saline wetland margins in Western Australia. *Nuytsia* 16: 317-320.