

Did you know ...?

native grasses and fire

that the first year after fire in many WA woodlands, including banksia and wandoo, the native annual speargrass *Austrostipa compressa* often dominates the understorey so that it becomes a golden yellow grassland? In subsequent years there are very few of these plants – only on disturbed track edges, for example. But because you can't see it, doesn't mean the plant isn't there! It is still present in the soil seed bank, just waiting for the right stimulus to grow again. A study of the Yule Brook Botany Reserve in 1998* found that up to 119 viable seeds per square metre were still present more than 45 years after the last fire-stimulated germination event!

On Gooseberry Hill in Kalamunda, it has been observed that little grassbirds will come in to nest in those years when the annual speargrass is dominant.

So take care, after a fire, that you don't attack this grass as a weed!

* Smith MA, Bell DT and WA Loneragan. 1999. Comparative seed germination ecology of *Austrostipa compressa* and *Ehrharta calycina* (Poaceae) in a Western Australian banksia woodland. *Aust. J. Ecology* 24: 35-42.

