

NEWS

SOUTH COAST LFW 'REVEAL THE PLANT CHALLENGE'

Sylvia Leighton

More than 100 vegetation communities mapped in a small area where only 11 vegetation communities had previously been recorded!

In early June the South Coast *Land For Wildlife* programme decided to focus on plants and present three workshops on related topics. The venue selected could not have been more topical – the Albany Herbarium which is located at the back of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) South Coast Office precinct. This is the largest herbarium outside Perth and contains 23,000 specimens.



LFW members being shown the process of storing pressed plant samples by the Coordinator of the Albany Herbarium, Coralie Hortin

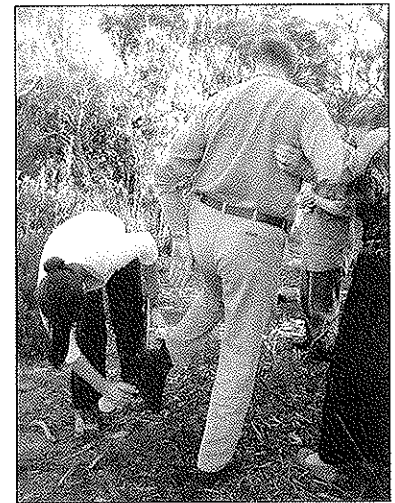
The herbarium is run by a dedicated team of local volunteers from the Albany Wildflower Society. The Coordinator, Coralie Hortin, demonstrated to the *LFW* members the detailed process of how a plant specimen is treated once it is submitted to the herbarium. They saw first-hand how the plants are carefully pressed, named, vouchered, mounted and stored in an insect-free environment. They were also able to explore the 'self help' herbarium in the front area of the building where members of the public are encouraged to bring in plant samples and try and identify these themselves.

Workshop members were then treated to a 'mind blowing' talk providing an insight into the complexity of the vegetation communities that we are dealing with in the south coast region. DEC regional botanist Libby Sandiford gave her first public presentation on the progress of the vegetation mapping team who have taken on the challenge of trying to produce vegetation

maps that truly represent what is out on the ground. They selected a 25 kilometre radius area of the Albany townsite to carry out the vegetation mapping thinking this would be a realistic area to be able to survey over the allocated nine months. Very quickly they realised that this was a very unrealistic expectation! Over the nine months they have recognised over 100 different vegetation communities and they have only surveyed about 20% of the total area! The old Beard maps had only recorded 11 vegetation communities for this same region.

Luckily the team was able to get an extension of funding for the project over another nine months. Some of the next challenges include how to incorporate components into the map that acknowledge recent vegetation community species composition changes due to events like dieback or repeated fire events that do not allow all species to propagate.

The last talk was provided by DEC Dieback Officer Nicole Moore. She particularly looked at precautionary actions *LFW* members can take to try and ensure that dieback is not brought onto their own properties. Many members thought that it might be easier to lock up the property and exclude all visitors! Nicole was more optimistic and gave the workshop members practical experience in cleaning of tyres and shoes. The members also visited a nearby dieback infection and were shocked to see the loss of species composition in the vegetation community.



Nicole Moore cleaning peoples' shoes ensuring that workshop participants were not responsible for carrying dieback spores in or out of the field site.

Photos: S. Leighton.