

Leeuwen's Lily

A botanical tribute to Stephen van Leeuwen

Staff at the Western Australian Herbarium marked NAIDOC Week with the publication of Leeuwen's lily (*Arthropodium vanleeuwenii*), named in honour of Stephen van Leeuwen, Curtin University's Indigenous Professor for Biodiversity and Environmental Science.

This delicate species is currently known from two small populations in the Pilbara region — one in Karinjini National Park, the other on a mining tenement — where it can be found on ironstone hillslopes, usually growing under spinifex. First collected for the Western Australian Herbarium by botanical consultants in 2016, the species was confirmed as new to western science by the Herbarium's Pilbara identification botanist Steve Dillon and native lily expert Terry Macfarlane, who were inspired to recognise Stephen's exceptional efforts in increasing our understanding of Pilbara flora.

Formerly a scientist at DBCA, Stephen spearheaded the Pilbara biological survey (2002–07) that resulted in almost 8000 plant voucher specimens being submitted to the Western Australian Herbarium. These specimens, collected by a team of botanists, technical staff and volunteers during 14 separate trips and across 426 survey sites, represent an extraordinary botanical legacy that will have far-reaching benefits for biodiversity conservation in this region. Leeuwen's lily is a nod to this effort and Stephen's enduring contribution to plant science and conservation in Western Australia.

Arthropodium vanleeuwenii is one of 50 Western Australian species formally documented in 2020 as part of a golden anniversary edition of the Herbarium's botanical journal *Nuytsia*. Most of these species are threatened or poorly known, with several known only from a single site or fewer than 50 plants. Giving them scientific names and providing descriptions to aid their identification is a critical first step in terms of their conservation and will hopefully lead to the discovery of more plants in the wild.

So be on the lookout for Leeuwen's lily when you're next in the Pilbara – it would be wonderful to locate more occurrences of this delightful rarity.



Left to right: *Arthropodium vanleeuwenii* is endemic to the Pilbara where it grows on rocky ironstone hillslopes; the delicate blooms of Leeuwen's lily open one after another; Stephen van Leeuwen in action during the Pilbara biological survey. Photos — Steve Dillon and Kate Brown

