

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS.

No. XV.—THE VIOLET-TIPPED HEATH.

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The so-called Heaths of Western Australia are amongst the earliest of the winter and spring wildflowers. The earliest are the Sundews, and these are followed by white and yellow flowers in profusion, amongst which the native Heaths are prominent.

Since the Heaths are so characteristic of our South-Western flora, I have selected this month one which is fairly common, and which has comparatively large flowers, for examination. The plant is *Conostephium pendulum*, and is one of the five species of a genus peculiar to our South-West. Most of you will be familiar with the plant, known as *Conostephium pendulum*, which decorates the sandy woodlands of the South-West at this time of the year.

There are several very characteristic features which render the plant easily recognized. First of all there is the peculiar shape of the flower, and its almost completely enveloped corolla. Then there is the curious hanging position of the flower and its stalks which are covered with numerous small and crowded bracts. Next you will notice the peculiar branching habit—the branches arise close to each other on the stem—and lastly there are the upright leaves with margins which curl inwards on the lower side. All of these characteristics at once proclaim the plant a *Conostephium*, though we have not yet examined it botanically. There are five species of *Conostephium*, and all share the above characteristics. Let us now examine the flower in greater detail. The flowers are solitary, on stalks which arise from the inner bases of the leaves. The flowers are therefore axillary, that is, they are borne in the axils of the leaves. The stalks or pedicels are covered with minute scale-like leaves or bracts; and, as we reach the flower, the bracts become larger, until eventually we pass into the largest bracts which envelop the flower itself. These bracts are of very firm consistency, and often dark at the tips. Pull each one off carefully, and mark its position in the sequence. When all are off you will find the corolla. The last five bract-like bodies are softly hairy on the outside, and have very thin margins. These are the sepals, and outside these are two more rigid organs called bracteoles. The remaining members are bracts. Really there is little to distinguish the sepals from the bracts except the matter of size and texture.

The corolla consists of a spindle-shaped organ which is much swollen about two-thirds of the way up, and from here upwards it is coloured a purple-violet; below it is almost white. It will be seen to be split into five segments or lobes towards the tip. These are the corolla lobes, the remainder being the corolla-tube. The flower never opens in the ordinary usage of the term, but the lobes remain together, forming a cone. This character alone distinguishes *Conostephium* from all other genera of the family.

Pink-tipped Heath (*Conostephium pendulum*, Benth.).

A. Showing habit. B. Flower. C. The same with bracts and sepals removed. D. Section of flower.

(B, C, and D enlarged; A, natural size.)