

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

A GUIDE TO THE WILDFLOWER DISTRICTS
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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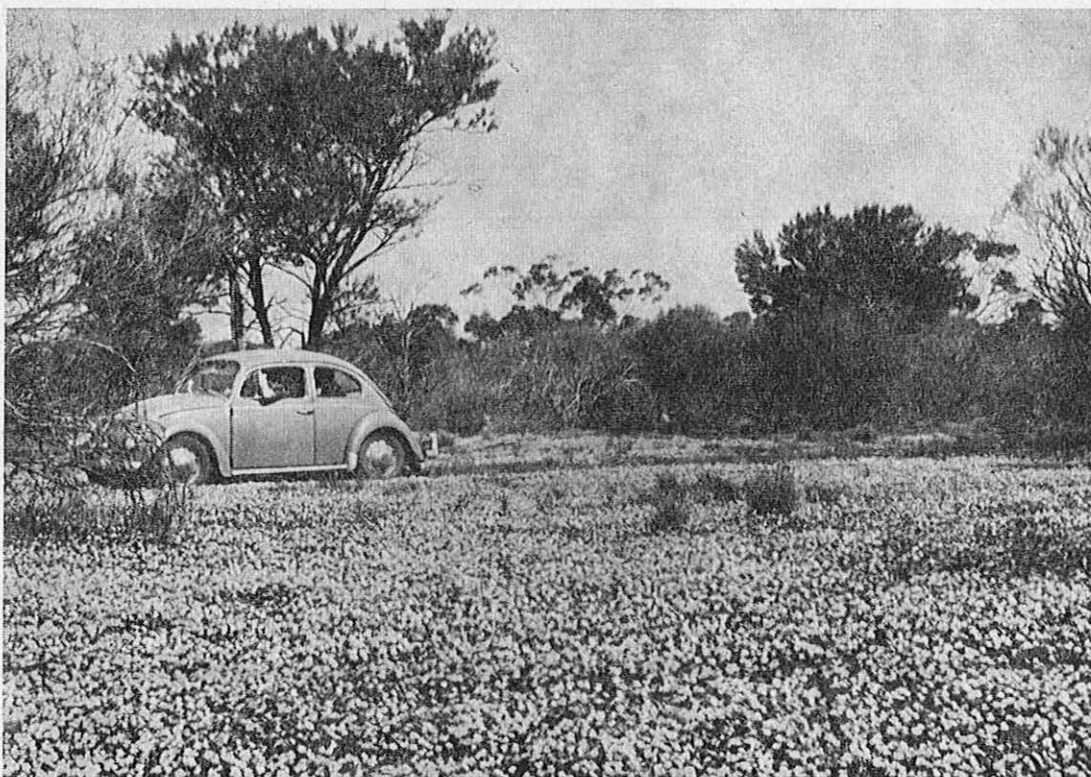
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ALTHOUGH the brilliance and diversity of West Australian wildflowers are widely appreciated, the localities where they can best be observed in their natural state are not so well-known.

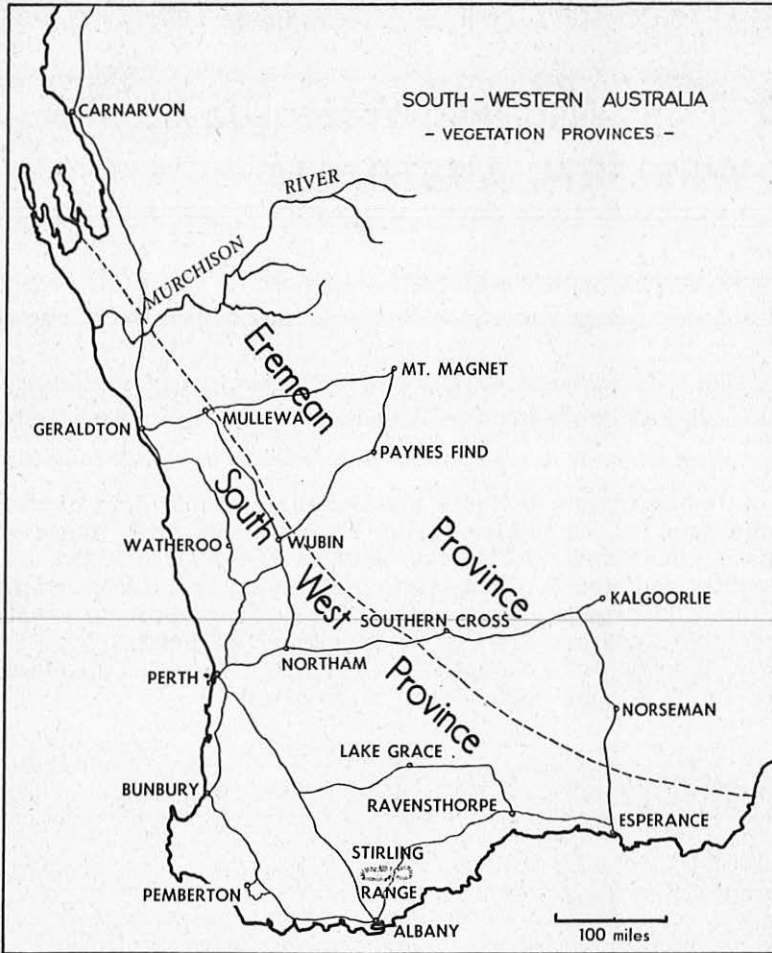
In this article a brief outline is given of the more important districts in the south western part of the State. This includes all the country south and west of a line roughly joining Shark Bay and Israelite Bay (east of Esperance). Known as the South-West Province, it is one of three vegetation provinces in W.A., and

includes most of the endemic flora of the State. The Mt. Magnet and Eastern Goldfields districts are also included, as they contain a different type of vegetation (representing the Eremean Province), yet are within easy reach of Perth.

Future articles will deal with individual districts in more detail.



Mulga country, with a carpet of *Velleia rosea*, a small annual of the Leschenaultia family. Everlastings form similar displays in this type of country, for example around Paynes Find



The major wildflower districts of Western Australia, and principal access routes

Northern Districts

To the north of Perth, the Murchison River-Shark Bay district contains some of the largest remaining areas of virgin sandplain in the State. Although much is still inaccessible, the North-West Coastal Highway and the road to Kalbarri, at the mouth of the Murchison, pass through extensive representative areas.

While September is the month to see the best general displays, flowers are to be found well into early summer. Many plants are endemic in this district (that is, they are not found elsewhere). These include certain species of *Banksia*, *Grevillea*, *Calothamnus* (claw-flower), *Verticordia* (featherflower or morrison) and *Pityrodia* (native foxglove). Smokebushes (*Conospermum*), wattles (*Acacia*) and myrtles (*Baeckea*, *Scholtzia*, etc.), are

common, while in other parts of the district everlastings form white, yellow or pink carpets.

Excellent displays of everlastings occur along the Great Northern Highway in the Paynes Find—Mount Magnet district, and along the road through Yalgoo to Mullewa. Being annuals, these plants depend on the rainfall for their appearance and in a dry year will form only poor displays. Two common species are *Helipterum splendidum* and *Cephalopterum drummondii*.

A worthwhile journey is that from Geraldton to Mullewa and southwards through Morawa, Wubin and Wongan Hills. Besides many floriferous shrubs there are colourful perennial or annual herbs, such as the wreath *leschenaultia*

Typical Eucalyptus woodland of the Eastern Goldfields, with masses of mulla mulla and everlastings



(*L. macrantha*), *Dampiera*, *Mallophora*, *Ptilotus* (mulla mulla) and *Logania*.

Still to the north of Perth, the sandplain country of the Midlands, west of the Geraldton Highway, is well known for its variety of fascinating flowers. This is the home of the black and yellow kangaroo paws, the orange and red coppercups (*Pileanthus* spp.), the beautiful *Verticordia grandis* and many others, including a host of Proteaceae and Myrtaceae. Access to the area can be made through Badgingarra, Watheroo and Eneabba, while small areas are still to be seen along the Geraldton Highway itself, such as north of Watheroo and around Mingenew.

The Perth District

Within 100 miles of Perth there are numerous drives which pass through excellent wildflower country.

Northwards, the Great Northern Highway through Bindoon and New Norcia passes displays (in August and September) of parrot bush (*Dryandra polycephala*), blue smokebush and leschenaultia, kangaroo paws and native buttercups, etc., amid jarrah, marri or wandoo forest.

From here, several roads lead westwards to the Mogumber-Regans Ford area, where sandplains support scrubby vegetation with a predominance of Proteaceae and Myrtaceae. The roads back to Perth, either through Gingin or Yanchep, pass through typical examples of coastal banksia woodland. Tuart woodland is also extensive south of Yanchep.

To the east and south-east, the Red Hill road to Toodyay, the Great Eastern Highway, and the Albany Highway all pass through jarrah-marri forest, with small tracts of wandoo on clay soils. Although they do not support massed displays of flowers, these areas nevertheless have many brightly-coloured species. Granite outcrops are common and carry a different vegetation from that of the surrounding bush which is occasionally quite spectacular, as in the Red Hill-Gidgieganup area. Plants of the granite include the sticky fringe myrtle (*Calytrix glutinosa*), featherflowers (*Verticordia huegelii* and *V. acerosa*), the granite petrophila (*Petrophila biloba*) and *Grevillea endlicheriana*. August and September are the best months for these districts.

Eastern Districts

Eastwards, beyond the jarrah forest, the Great Eastern Highway traverses farming country until Southern Cross is reached. However, from there onwards is almost continuous sandheath for many miles. While many common species of *Grevillea*, *Hakea*, *Verticordia*, etc., are found here, less well-known plants include the native pomegranate (*Balaustion pulcherrimum*), the golden *Acacia rossei* and the red-flowered *Burtonia hendersonii*.

Farther east, the sandheath merges into the eucalyptus woodland of the Eastern Goldfields. Here again, the rainfall determines the appearance of the wildflowers, but in a good year the Kalgoorlie-Norseman area becomes a huge garden. Annuals provide the white, yellow and pink of everlastings and mulla mulla, while flowering shrubs include the genera *Eremophila*, *Cassia*, *Olearia* and many others. The tall, widely spaced eucalypts dominate this countryside, and some, such as the coral gum, and Strickland's gum have attractive flowers. This type of bush also extends eastwards to the edge of the Nullarbor plain. It is at its best in September.

South of Norseman, the woodland passes into the southern sandheaths, which extend from Israelite Bay in the east to the Stirling Ranges in the west. They include the Esperance, Ravens-thorpe, Ongerup and Lake Grace-Newdegate districts. While the massed effect is not so evident, there is still an abundance of colourful and interesting species, many of which are endemic to the district. These include the red kangaroo paw, the Qualup bell, the lantern hakea and many banksia species.

Although September is again the best month, many species flower in winter or early summer, and on the coast itself, some flowers are to be seen at almost any time of the year.

The South-West

To the south of Perth, there are three areas of outstanding interest—the Stirling Range, Albany, and the karri forest centred on Pemberton.

The Stirling Range 200 miles south-east of Perth, rises magnificently above the surrounding plain. The base and lower slopes support either woodland of

jarrah, marri, wandoo or banksia, or a dense scrub which extends upwards and covers the higher slopes and summits also. Many species are endemic. Examples are the mountain bells and heaths (*Darwinia* and *Andersonia* species), and certain species of banksia and pea flowers.

The main flowering times are August-October on the lower slopes, and October-November towards the summits, while there are also many winter-flowering species.

The Albany district contains a wealth of wildflowers ranging from spectacular shrubs or trees such as the scarlet banksia and crimson bottlebrush, down to tiny annuals such as trigger plants and sundews. There is a variety of vegetation types also—the karri forest in the Porongorups, the jarrah-marri forest and woodland, scrub-covered coastal hills, swamps, and, to the east, the western edge of the southern sandplains. Each type has its own complement of wildflowers. Smokebush, cone flowers (*Isopogon* and *Petrophila*), swamp daisies (*Actinodium*), red and scented boronia, and the Southern Cross (*Xanthosia*) are typical plants of the district. While flowers can be seen here at any season, the greatest abundance occurs between August and November.

Westwards from Albany, the main road passes into the principal Karri forest in the Walpole-Pemberton district. Majestic at all times of the year, the forest is enhanced in September and October by colourful shrubs and creepers such as tree hovea and the coral vine. North of Manjimup and the Donnelly River, the jarrah forest is encountered again, extending in a broad belt to the Darling Range behind Perth.

Although there are numerous other small areas where wildflowers display their brilliance, those outlined above are the principal districts. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that while the spring months of September and October usually bring the best displays, there are many winter and summer-flowering species to be seen in most districts. There is no time of the year when the bush is completely without flowers, and often those hardy enough to endure the summer sun are extremely colourful or of unusual interest.