



Wildflower season at Eurardy Reserve

Charlotte Francis reports on floral happenings at Eurardy Reserve in Western Australia

Autumn and winter rains ushered in a bumper wildflower season at Eurardy Reserve this spring. 'The 2008 season has been the best for years,' say Paul and Leanne Hales, who arrived as Eurardy's first reserve managers in September 2005.

Visitors taking part in guided tours or doing the self-guided walking tour have been treated to spectacular displays of some of Eurardy's 499 plant species. The area around the homestead has been swathed in carpets of crimson pink parakeelya, and other species in bloom include grevilleas, banksias, lechenaultias (wreath flowers), blue and white cornflowers, Mangles' kangaroo paw, boronia, thryoptomene, native foxglove, dampiera, smokebush, fringe lilies, starflowers (*Calytrix*), Mulla Mulla and Eurardy wax plant.

Located within the South-West Botanical Province, one of Bush Heritage's priority conservation regions, Eurardy lies within Australia's only 'global biodiversity hotspot', one of 34 areas rated by Conservation International as the most biologically rich in the world. Although the province accounts for only 0.23 per cent of the Earth's land surface, it supports 12.6 per cent of the world's rare and threatened flora.

Prior to Bush Heritage ownership, Eurardy was a working sheep station and already well known for its extraordinary floral diversity. During the wildflower season, an average of 300 tourists – from campers to birdwatchers – visit the reserve, which is located just off the north-west coastal highway, 150 km north of Geraldton.

On arrival at Eurardy, Paul and Leanne inherited a wealth of information from the Wildflower Society of Western Australia (WSWA). The Wildflower

Society had carried out a bushland survey at Eurardy in 2003 and identified 481 native plant species (and 34 weeds!). Members of the Society compiled comprehensive species lists, and pressed and mounted each specimen to be stored in a field herbarium at the reserve.

A WSWA survey at Eurardy in 2006 revealed a further eighteen native plant species (and two more weeds).

'The field herbarium is constantly being updated as new species are found. It contains much more detailed information than a standard field guide,' explains Leanne. 'We are so grateful to the WSWA for all their hard work and dedication in helping to catalogue Eurardy's flora.'

The WSWA's 2003 botanical survey was mainly carried out in the reserve's heathland areas. In 2006, the Hales invited WSWA members back to survey other areas of the reserve including the salt pans and areas that had been cultivated in the past.

Research carried out by groups such as WSWA is invaluable for Bush Heritage, as we are able to use data gathered by research partners to help inform our management and monitoring activities at each reserve. For example, one of the ongoing management priorities at Eurardy is to control populations of feral rabbits and goats, which cause damage to the native vegetation. Orchids, in particular, are vulnerable to damage by rabbits. With a vigilant feral animal control program in operation, the health of the landscape at Eurardy is improving; the soil is less compacted, groundcover is re-emerging and species favoured by



Clockwise from top: Wreath leschenaultia (*Leschenaultia macrantha*). Kangaroo-paws (*Anigozanthos*). Common lamb ears (*Isotropis cuneifolia*). The critically endangered short-petalled beyeria (*Beyeria lepidopetala*). PHOTOS: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES *Verticordia x euradyensis*, a natural hybrid of two verticordias named after Eurardy. PHOTO: MATT WARNOCK Myrtaceae (*Verticordia monadelph*). PHOTO: JULIAN FENESSY

grazing goats, such as labichea, are once again thriving.

Populations of Eurardy's five Declared Rare Flora – the short-petalled beyeria, Beard's mallee, the Kalbarri spider orchid, the dragon orchid, and the northern dwarf spider orchid – are monitored annually. Photo monitoring is also carried out at key tourist sites to evaluate the impact of cars and visitors and to guard against new species of weed being introduced.

Visitors to Eurardy this spring have also enjoyed the fabulous diversity of birdlife. Regular sightings of raptors such as the spotted harrier, the square-tailed kite, the black-breasted buzzard and little eagles indicate that the reserve is supporting healthy populations of small mammals. Large flocks of red-tailed black cockatoos and hundreds of tree martins have also been seen, while a recent survey of the ground-dwelling malleefowl undertaken by eighteen volunteers turned up several previously unmapped mallee fowl mounds as well as fresh tracks. These mounds, along with those previously mapped, will be monitored over the coming months to see if the malleefowl are actively breeding on Eurardy.

All in all, it has been a bountiful spring for plants and animals at Eurardy.



Changing reserves

Paul and Leanne Hales and their two young daughters recently moved to north-east Queensland to take over the management of Bush Heritage's Yourka Reserve. Yourka is a property of 43 500 hectares located 130 kilometres south of Cairns on the western edge of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The Hales are excited to be living and working on their second Bush Heritage reserve.

The new staff at Eurardy, Matt Warnock and Elizabeth Lescheid, are also seasoned Bush Heritage people. Matt (the new Reserve Manager) and Elizabeth (Eurardy's Tourism and Visitation Officer) have spent the last two years based at Queensland's Carnarvon Station Reserve, where Matt was a Field Officer Trainee and Elizabeth a dedicated volunteer.

Homestead-style accommodation, caravan/camping sites and wildflower tours are available at Eurardy Reserve. Access is 2WD. Bookings and enquiries can be made directly with the reserve managers on (08) 9936 1038, or via email: eurardy@bushheritage.org.au.



Clockwise from top: Paul and Leanne Hales pictured here with Beth (centre) and Macey. PHOTO: BUSH HERITAGE Matt Warnock and Elizabeth Lescheid are pictured wearing shirts from Gondwana, a Bush Heritage partner. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MATT WARNOCK AND ELIZABETH LESCHIED A sample from Eurardy's field herbarium. PHOTO: LEANNE AND PAUL HALES Kalbarri spider orchid (*Caladenia wanosa*) is listed as Declared Rare Flora, Eurardy Reserve, WA. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES