

Rare WA sun orchid found on Bush Heritage property

The discovery of a population of rare sun orchids on a conservation property in south-west Western Australia will contribute to knowledge of this little known plant. It also confirms the status of the area as a valuable biodiversity hotspot.



Credit: Keith Smith

This is the largest population of the orchid (*Thelymitra ongerup*) ever found and was discovered on Beringa Reserve, a 1200 hectare property located 100 km from Albany that is owned and managed by the conservation organisation [Bush Heritage Australia](#).

Beringa Reserve is part of [Gondwana Link](#), an ambitious project to restore a 1000 km swathe of bushland from Western Australia's southwest to the edge of the Nullarbor Plain. This landscape-scale corridor is in Australia's only internationally recognised global biodiversity hotspot, an area that contains 12.6% of the world's rare and threatened flora, although it covers only 0.23% of the world's surface.

The orchid was discovered by orchid enthusiast Keith Smith during a study of vegetation communities on Beringa Reserve. Its identity was confirmed by the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation.

'I saw a bright yellow colour through the window and yelled out to the driver to stop,' says Mr Smith.

'It also passed the "smell test" as the orchid has a unique and possibly unpleasant, odour.'

'Knowledge of the orchid and its history is extremely limited – it has not been studied or named because it is so difficult to actually find,' says Bush Heritage ecologist Angela Sanders.

The orchid has only ever been recorded in two other locations, both of which are much smaller populations.

'This is a wonderful find and reaffirms that we're doing the right things on the property,' says Simon Smale, Bush Heritage's Gondwana Link Landscape Manager.

'Managing weeds, restoring the landscape and the subsequent discovery of this orchid tells us it is even more essential that remnant bushland is kept intact.'

As well as protecting this very rare sun orchid, Beringa Reserve provides feeding habitat for threatened Carnaby's Black Cockatoo and is part of a program to increase numbers of threatened tammar and black-gloved wallabies.

Source: Bush Heritage Australia

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