

Plant that was presumed extinct turns up on SA roadside

A newly-discovered population of one of South Australia's most enigmatic threatened plants – the spiny daisy – has been confirmed in the Flinders Ranges. The discovery takes the number of known natural occurrences in the world to six.



Credit: Daniel Hanisch, DEWR

In August last year, field naturalist Robbie Bates was searching for native plants east of SA's Mount Remarkable when he came across the distinctive silvery-grey shrubs growing along a roadside.

His amazing find has since been confirmed by the SA Herbarium. A spiny daisy recovery team met recently at Melrose to check out the newly-discovered population.

Natural Resources Northern and Yorke Ecologist, Jean Turner, says the spiny daisy is unusual as it doesn't seem to produce viable seeds, despite the fact plants flower prolifically.

'Spiny daisy plants reproduce by suckering. Genetic testing has shown that all the shrubs at any one site are genetically identical, but each of the five populations tested so far is distinct from each other,' Ms Turner said.

‘We don’t know why the plants occur in such isolated populations and it will be interesting to have the Melrose population tested to see if it is different from all the others.’

The sixth population makes the future prospects of spiny daisy slightly more secure, but even so, it remains critically endangered and the recovery team will continue overseeing its long-term conservation.

Spiny daisy (*Acanthocladium dockeri*) was first collected in central western NSW in 1860 during the Burke and Wills expedition. A second collection was made in the South Australian Riverland in 1910.

It hasn’t been sighted in either of these areas since, and was presumed extinct until its rediscovery in 1999 by Laura landholder, Paul Slattery.

Despite extensive searches, only four additional populations had ever been found ahead of the recent discovery near Melrose.

All six spiny daisy populations occur in the Northern and Yorke Natural Resource Management region of South Australia, scattered from near Hart in the south to the northern-most population near Telowie.

The spiny daisy is listed as critically endangered under the Commonwealth’s Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and as endangered in SA.

Source: Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWR)

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC13027>