

# Young plant rescuer on a mission

June 27 2014, by David Stacey

---



There are only 400 Stirling Range Wattles and 600 Kambellup Banksias alive in the wild - and a researcher at The University of Western Australia has devoted the last four years of her life to making sure the two species are not lost forever.

Dr Christine Allen, who recently finished her PhD, said the species, *Acacia awestoniana* and *Banksia ionthocarpa*, were on a long list of thousands of threatened plants compiled by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW) signposted for direct action.

"People often don't realise that a high proportion of plant species are threatened with extinction in the south-west," she said. "The natural populations of both species in this study have severely declined over the

years and the reasons are largely unknown"

In 2010, Christine and her main supervisor Associate Professor Pieter Poot teamed up with DPAW staff and a group of UWA student volunteers to plant 800 Wattle and 400 Banksia seedlings in the Stirling Range National Park. Four years later, up to 80 per cent of the seedlings have not only survived but some of the Wattle seedlings are beginning to produce flower buds.

Her work is important not only in rescuing these species but also because it provides a blueprint for saving other [plant species](#) in the south-west, which is a world biodiversity hotspot. And if plants can be saved, then whole ecosystems involving native insects, birds and marsupials can also be protected.

By working out the best watering regimes for the seedlings and whether they fare better when planted in different habitats and as small or big seedlings, Christine's research may enable other plant conservationists in the region to replicate her good results.

But, she said, while many people enjoyed walking and hiking in the area and cared about nature, they needed to be aware that one of the biggest threats to plants - along with fire and rabbits - was the soil fungus *Phytophthora*.

"People should clean their boots, stay on the paths and, because the fungus spreads in water, try not to tramp through mud and puddles," she said.

Christine came to UWA from NSW to carry out her PhD and enjoys WA so much - and particularly the Albany region - that she hopes to stay and continue her conservation work.

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Young plant rescuer on a mission (2014, June 27) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-young-rescuer-mission.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.