

Curtin researchers find new critically endangered carnivorous plants

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Credit: Curtin University

Curtin University researchers have discovered a new population of a critically endangered aquatic carnivorous plant in Western Australia's remote Kimberley, following a 10-year search of the region.

During a recent botanical expedition to the northern Kimberley, several thousand "aquatic venus flytrap plants," *Aldrovanda vesiculosa*, were found growing in a billabong on Theda Station, located east of the Mitchell Plateau, supported by Dunkeld Pastoral.

Dr. Adam Cross and Honours student Thilo Krueger, from the ARC Centre for Mine Site Restoration in Curtin's School of Molecular and Life Sciences, have each spent almost a decade searching swamps and billabongs throughout northern Australia for the critically endangered species and other carnivorous plants.

Dr. Cross, who wrote a book about the plant in 2012, said the discovery of a new population in WA's remote Kimberley region was a dream come true.

"When I first saw it, I thought it was just another common species that has similar whorls of leaves, but when I got closer and saw the traps at the end of the leaves, I couldn't believe my eyes," Dr. Cross said.

"This is the first time this species has been found in the Kimberley for more than 20 years. The only other known population from Western Australia is more than 2,000 kilometres away near Esperance in the State's south, where a small population of only a few dozen plants was discovered in 2007.

"This new location in the remote northern Kimberley is one of the largest populations ever discovered in Australia, in an area where habitat is still relatively pristine. This discovery gives us hope that northern Australia is still a stronghold for the species in the face of its continuing global decline."

Mr Krueger, who has moved from Germany to study at Curtin University in Western Australia, said he was ecstatic the pair's decade-

long search had resulted in a new discovery.

"Adam was just looking at me with this look of complete amazement and I immediately knew he had found something very, very exciting," Mr Krueger said.

"Although it was once widespread around the world, it is now considered critically endangered. Habitat loss and changes to water quality have seen the species become extinct in up to 30 countries, so the fact that we have found several thousand plants in Western Australia is significant."

The species produces unique underwater snapping traps to capture and digest small insect prey, which explains its description as an 'aquatic venus flytrap'.

A critically endangered species, *Aldrovanda vesiculosa* is currently only located in less than 20 known locations spread across four continents.

Provided by Curtin University

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