

Whibley Wattle (*Acacia whibleyana*)

Threatened species fact sheet



Introduction

Acacia whibleyana, known as Whibley Wattle is endemic to south-eastern Eyre Peninsula, found in the local area around Tumby Bay. This species was named in honour of Mr D.J.W Whibley, who was a long-time member of the State Herbarium of South Australia, and the author of the first edition of the highly sort after field guide 'Acacias of South Australia'.

Description

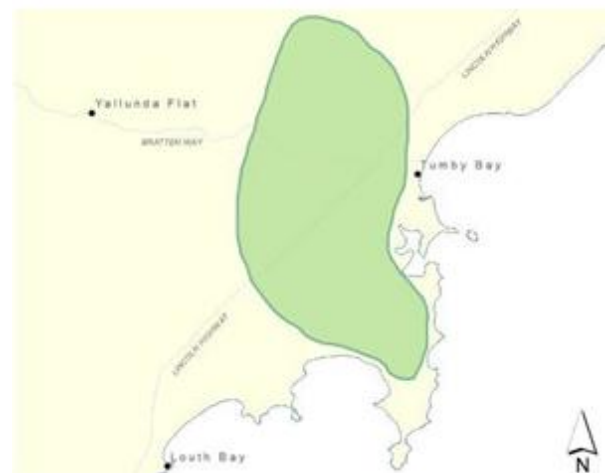
Whibley Wattle is a dense shrub growing 1.5 to 2.5m high, spreading from 2.5 to 4m wide. The thick phyllodes (not true leaves) are rigid, with one edge more curved, ending in a sharp point. The plant is fairly inconspicuous for most of the year, but bursts into colour with bright golden flowers in September. The brown seed pods are up to 4.5cm long, smooth and twisted in shape, ripening in late December.

Conservation status

Whibley Wattle is listed nationally as Endangered, because of its low population size and limited distribution. This species is only found around Tumby Bay in small isolated areas of remnant vegetation surrounded by cropping and grazing land. It is listed under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), and *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (South Australia).

Distribution

In the 1990's, only two subpopulations of Whibley Wattle were recorded near Tumby Bay, with less than 200 plants recorded. Through community awareness and plant surveys, we have now discovered an additional three subpopulations. More than 1800 remnant plants have now been recorded across the five main subpopulations.



Whibley Wattle grows amongst remnant and roadside vegetation near the township of Tumby Bay. In the east, higher rainfall and fertile loamy-clay soils enables the plant to grow taller and with more open structure. Here they can be found growing under taller eucalypts. In the south, the Whibley Wattle grows adjacent to salt lakes, on sandy loam soils where the plants are typically much smaller and display a more compact habit.

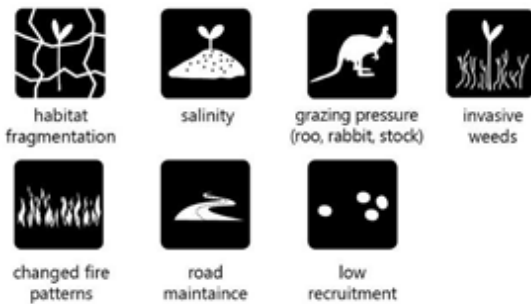
Threats

Habitat fragmentation is the Whibley Wattle's greatest threat, resulting in isolated distribution and low plant densities. Agricultural land surrounds all five subpopulations, and four of the five subpopulations adjoin or occur within a road reserve. Wattles often grow right on the edge of country roads, making them highly susceptible to any road widening or upgrade activities.

Competition from weeds including Bridal Creeper, African Boxthorn and Japanese Rice Millet threaten Whibley's Wattle, especially within roadside populations.

Two subpopulations grow around salt lakes and along creek lines. Hydrologic changes which increase salinity will likely threaten plant health and survival.

Diseases and pests are also present within some populations, and their long-term impacts largely unknown.



Recovery

The long-term goal for Whibley Wattle is to down-list its conservation status from Endangered to Vulnerable, and to continue to recover and manage its critical habitat. Short-term, the aim is to stabilise Whibley Wattle's conservation status at Endangered.

A recovery plan (2007) and conservation advice (updated 2018) have been written for Whibley Wattle as a result of the species status as Endangered and its listing at the national level.



Left: fencing to protect remnant Whibley Wattle populations from grazing. Right: planting out Whibley Wattle seedlings, propagated from seed.

To ensure the long-term conservation of the species, a management plan (2019) has also been developed to help identify threats and determine priorities to ensure viable subpopulations of Whibley Wattle are maintained and enhanced.

A helping hand

The lack of recruitment is one of the greatest threats to a self-sustaining population such as Whibley Wattle. With this at the forefront, The University of Adelaide was successful gaining a research grant in 2019 from the Australian Flora Foundation to trial mechanical soil disturbance as an alternative to ecological burning for promotion of Whibley Wattle germination and seedling establishment. This field trial ended in October 2021, with data currently being analysed and published.



Whibley Wattle seedling in monitoring plot at trial site.

Previous project funding from 2017-18 and 2018-19 (Threatened Species Funding and National Landcare Program respectively) enabled a variety of activities to be achieved to help conserve the Whibley Wattle such as community awareness, fencing, pest weed and rabbit control, installing roadside markers, translocation plantings and seed banking.

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