Project Pine Point

Acacia rhetinocarpa or Neat Wattle

Yorke Peninsula is one of the richest agricultural areas in South Australia, and those who work the land can be justly proud of the way that such fine harvests can be gleaned from this rich environment.
It has been extremely hard work though, and nobody can take that away from those who ventured into this area in those early days, to clear the land so that a living could be made from it.
Over the years, vast tracts of land were cleared, and one can only imagine what the Yorke Peninsula might have looked like before all that clearing began.

The down side of land clearing is the significant loss of native species, and just as importantly, the habitat that the native fauna depended upon for food and shelter.
One such species that was reduced to only a handful of individuals is the *Acacia rhetinocarpa*, or Neat Wattle.

The species *Acacia rhetinocarpa* that is found here on Yorke Peninsula is one of the last strong-holds of this very rare Wattle. It is not recorded outside of South Australia and known to be found only in two other restricted areas within this State. P.S. Green in "Threatened Plants of Yorke Peninsula" (1993) has determined this plant to be endangered for the Yorke Peninsula region.

The Pine Point Project had its beginnings back in June 1996, but prior to that, while on an excursion with the Australian Plants Society to Innes National Park; we placed on our itinerary the search for *Acacia rhetinocarpa* and *Acacia enterocarpa*, knowing that both species are so rare on Yorke Peninsula.
We eventually did find the *Acacia rhetinocarpa* at a place where we stopped for lunch, and it was that discovery that began the work that the COOTS Group and TPAG (Threatened Plant Action Group) continue to this very day.
A management plan was drawn up between the two groups, with a commitment to protect the existing specimens, which were down to only around 200 individuals, and to increase their numbers significantly.

Work began on weed reduction, in the main reserve area, (section 202) and the propagation of the many species to be planted throughout the site, especially the *Acacia rhetinocarpa*. Negotiations were made with the adjacent landholders to fence portions of their paddocks adjacent to the project, to create buffer zones for section 202, and soon the project had enlarged quite significantly.

This has now enabled us to extend the range of the *Acacia rhetinocarpa* much further, thus protecting the species even more, because if a bush-fire happened to pass through the area, many specimens could be wiped out.
By not having a concentrated population, the chances of saving the species is far greater.
We have noted scattered specimens as far as five (5) kilometres from the main reserve area.

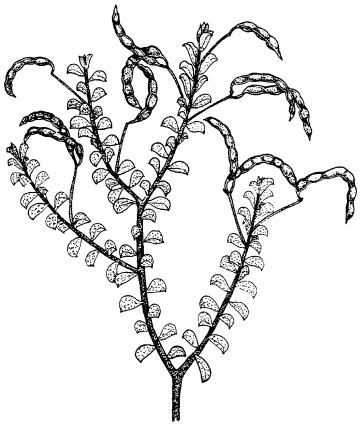
Each year we have five (5) programmed weekends at the site, and that time is spent planting, doing weed removal, and collecting seed and cutting material.
Each year we have an annual seed sowing day, where volunteers sow the seed in boxes, and then baby-sit them at home until the seedlings are large enough to plant out, generally after the first rains in May/June.

Seed is collected around the last few weeks of the year, and I normally head over to Yorke Peninsula the day after Christmas, and in most cases will collect significant amounts of seed. Seed is encased in a sticky resinous pod, and will stick to your fingers and clothes. It makes for an interesting time when trying to extract the seed from the pod, ready for planting.

As with other Acacia species, the seed is soaked in very hot water for a day or two, before it can be planted. It can also be scarified (eg scratch/break the testa with sandpaper) because moisture is the trigger that makes the embryo swell, and begin to germinate.

In the right conditions, the seedling begins to emerge, (around 14 days normally) and quickly develops. Once the seedling reaches 15 to 20 cm, it can be planted into its final position.

By the second year, it has begun to flower, and seed is then being produced.



Habit drawing of *Acacia rhetinocarpa*

Acacia rhetinocarpa is an erect, compact and rounded shrub up to 1.5 metres in height. It is a very easy species to grow, and in its natural environment it has adapted so well, that it is one of the few species that will survive the harshest of conditions, surprisingly better than even the Eucalypt species.

Jeff Reid – COOTS Coordinator.