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# WA terrestrial orchids in situ

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## WA terrestrial orchids in situ – a four-day field trip to the Mid-west

One of the major attractions for some of interstate and overseas registrants for the WA Orchid Spectacular was to opportunity to see West Australian terrestrial orchids in their natural setting. Two four-day field trips to the Mid-west were offered to registrants, and were sold out with the maximum number of 20 persons for each signing up. The tours were led by Andrew Brown and Garry Brockman respectively, and left Perth at 8.30 on the Monday and Tuesday mornings after WAOS.



Tour 2 group - Photo Chris Jones

The tours included all transport, accommodation and all meals. The first night was spent in Dongara, the second in Kalbarri and the last night back in Dongara. Each day, the groups made 4 or 5 stops to see WA terrestrial orchids in flower, in bud and some that were leaf only.

Andrew and Garry had visited most of the proposed sites the week prior, and had abandoned some planned stops as there were few or no plants in flower, and even fewer in bud that were advanced enough to be open a week later. However, they

managed to find other locations that provided exactly what the tour participants wanted - lots of orchids in flower!

I was fortunate to be on the second tour which benefited from the regular daily communication between Andrew and Garry about what was in flower and where it was. Our group included three New Zealanders and two Queenslanders, two Victorians all of whom thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The rest of us came from WA.

Over the 4 days, we saw thirty-seven different species and four hybrids in flower, many of these in more than one location. Garry was able to identify the species for us, and after we left each location, would tell us what we saw so that those members who wanted to be able to label their photos could do so. Garry has also provided us with maps showing where we stopped each day, and a list of the orchids that were sighted at each location.



For many of us, this field trip was our first opportunity to see the Queen of Sheba in the flesh rather than in pictures. On the last day, at our last stop, this ambition was realised as we sighted two flowering plants of *Thelymitra pulcherrima*, the Northern Queen of Sheba. We had help from Andrew who marked to location the day before, and a colleague of theirs who sighted the first plant and gave them a GPS location. A member of our group then found another nearby. While it was a quite a walk into the location through soft sand, everyone was delighted once we got there and found the orchid in flower on a somewhat overcast day.

Andrew's group the previous day had not been so fortunate with the weather, and it needed a little 'hot' Andrew breath for the Northern Queen of Sheba to open up for them. The low scrubby habitat looked most uninviting compared with some areas that we visited, but delivered exactly what we all hoped to see (although there were relatively few plants readily sighted).

*Thelymitra pulcherrima*

Photo Manee Poffley





*Thelymitra pulcherrima* habitat



So, let us start from the beginning. We left Scarborough a little after 9.00 as the bus had a flat battery (which had to be changed and did not bother us again) and headed up through Wanneroo to Mogumber where we made our first stop where we sighted 7 species in flower, *Diuris brumalis*, *Diuris refractor*, *Diuris brumalis* x *Diuris refractor*, *Pheladenia deformis*, *Pterostylis orbiculatus*, *Pterostylis platypetala* and *Pterostylis brevisepala* ms [*Pterostylis* spp short sepals].. After 45 minutes or so, we travelled further north to Bulbarnett Reserve where we also saw 7 species in flower, *Caladenia dundasiae*, *Caladenia longicauda* subsp. (sp Bullbarnett), *Diuris refractor*, *Pheladenia deformis*, *Pterostylis orbiculatus*, *Pterostylis platypetala*, and *Pterostylis scabra*. After collecting lunch in Moora, we visited Candy's Reserve where we saw 4 species in flower, *Caladenia exilis* subsp. *vanleeuwenii*, *Diuris recurva*, *Pterostylis scitula* and *Pterostylis scabra*. Then back on the bus before stopping briefly at North West Road where we saw only one species in flower, *Diuris tinkerii*. Our last stop for the day was Coomaloo just outside Dongara where we saw 3 species in flower, *Pheladenia deformis*, *Pterostylis dilatata* and *Pterostylis orbiculatus*. Our overnight accommodation at Dongara Motel was excellent, with a great meal and comfortable rooms. A few of the orchids we saw on day 1 were:



*Caladenia longicauda* ssp *Bullbarnett*



*Caladenia dundasiae*



Massed *Pterostylis scabra*



Garry advising the orchid hunters



After a delicious breakfast and collecting our lunch, day two saw us set off at about 8.30 am heading north. Our first stop was at Oakajee where we saw 8 species in flower, *Caladenia flava* subsp. *maculata*, *Caladenia footiana*, *Caladenia nobilis*, *Diuris carecta*, *Diuris recurva*, *Pheladenia deformis*, *Pterostylis sanguinea* and *Thelymitra antennifera* [closed due to weather]. Once again after about 45 minutes, we reboarded the bus and drove to Yerrina Springs Road where we made two stops. At the first of these, we saw only one species in flower, *Diuris recurva*. However, our second stop was much more productive, and we saw 9 species in flower, *Caladenia flava* subsp. *Maculata*, *Caladenia elegans*, *Caladenia vulgata*, *Caladenia elegans* x *vulgata*, *Caladenia* [?]*hoffmanii* x *vulgata*, *Diuris recurva*, *Prasophyllum gracile*, *Pterostylis sinuata*, and *Pterostylis* spp inland snail. The highlight of this stop was sighting *Pterostylis sinuata* in flower. It appears that this threatened species is known in only two populations, one of which was included in our tour. We saw some 8-10 plants, with two or three in flower – a rare treat! We then travelled to Binu West Road where the effect of poor winter rainfall was very evident on crops and the scarcity of flowering orchids and wildflowers generally. At this stop, we saw only one orchid in flower, the ubiquitous *Pheladenia deformis*. Our final stop for the day was Mushroom Rock just outside Kalbarri. Here we saw the recently described *Diuris oraria* in flower.

A few of the orchids that we saw on day 2 were:



*Diuris recurva*



*Caladenia elegans*



*Caladenia nobilis*



*Pterostylis sinuata*





Local fauna that did not want to see us!

Our overnight stay at the Kalbarri Palms resort was pleasant, despite a recent and unexpected change in management that resulted in the closure of their restaurant. We were accommodated at another restaurant nearby for dinner, and next door for breakfast in the morning. After breakfast and collecting our lunches, we set out at about 8.45 heading south. Our first stop was the Junga Dam Gravel Pit where we saw 5 species in flower, *Caladenia flava* subsp. *Maculata*, *Caladenia pachychila*, *Diuris carecta*, *Pheladenia deformis* and *Pterostylis* spp. inland snail. These orchids were all observed in a fairly limited area, so after 30 or so minutes, we all boarded the bus and travelled to Wells Siding Road. Here, we saw 6 species in flower, *Caladenia flava* subsp. *maculata*, *Caladenia hirta* subsp. *rosea*, *Caladenia nobilis*, *Diuris refractor*, *Pheladenia deformis* and *Pterostylis* spp inland snail. Each of our stops on day three produced a good range of orchids in flower, and as always, many more in leaf or in bud. Stop number three was along the East Dongara Tabletop Road where we saw 7 species in flower, *Caladenia flava* subsp. *Maculata*, *Caladenia footiana*, *Pheladenia deformis*, *Pterostylis* spp Inland snail, *Pterostylis orbiculatus*, *Pterostylis scabra* and *Pterostylis vittata*. The final stop for the day was the along Yandanooka West Road where we saw another 6 species in flower, *Caladenia nobilis* [midwest form], *Diuris hazeliae*, *Diuris refractor*, *Diuris hazeliae* x *Diuris refractor*, *Pterostylis* spp inland snail and *Pterostylis scabra*. A few of the orchids we saw on day 3 were:



*Diuris carecta*



*Caladenia hirta* ssp. *rosea*





*Diuris hazeliae*



*Pheladenia deformis*

*Pheladenia deformis* was certainly the most widespread and commonly occurring orchid that we saw in flower, and the colour varied from a quite intense blue to a much more washed out bluish/white on flowers that had been out for some time.

Once again, our overnight accommodation at Dongara Motel was excellent, with a great meal and comfortable rooms. After breakfast and a slightly earlier start to our final day, we set off with high expectations that we would be able to see the flowering plant of *Thelymitra pulcherrima* that had been sighted by the tour 1 group the previous day. As the weather was fine and warmer than the previous day (although somewhat overcast), Garry thought that we had an excellent opportunity to see this species in flower.

Our first three stops for the day were along Coolimba Road, Eneabba. While we sighted a few orchids in flower, they were somewhat scarce. With the majority in bud or just leaves, there were no as many as the previous day, however we did see *Cyrtostylis huegelii*, *Caladenia crebra* and *Pterostylis microglossa* in flower. Gary showed us that *Caladenia crebra* is generally found growing in thickets of *Eucalyptus erythrocorys* as shown in the photo.



*Cyrtostylis huegelii*



*Caladenia crebra*





*Pterostylis microglossa*



*Eucalyptus erythrocorys* thicket

Our second last stop for the tour was Cockleshell Gully Road where we saw *Caladenia longicauda* subsp. *borealis*, *Caladenia occidentalis*, more of the very common *Pheladenia deformis* and *Pterostylis platypetala*.



*Caladenia longicauda* subsp. *borealis*



*Caladenia occidentalis*

Our final stop was along the Brand Highway near Waddi Road. As we had hoped, we saw *Thelymitra pulcherrima* in flower. Thanks to one eagle-eyed members of our group, we sighted not one, but two plants of *Thelymitra pulcherrima*. We also saw a few plants of *Caladenia flava* subsp. *flava* and *Pterostylis dilatata*.



Photo  
Manee  
Poffley



*Thelymitra pulcherrima* – the Northern Queen of Sheba





*Thelymitra pulcherrima* habitat



Despite our concerns prior to WAOS that the lack of June rain would substantially reduce the number of orchids that we would be able to show tour participants, thanks to Andrew Brown and Garry Brockman's careful planning and reconnaissance the week before the show, a god number of orchids in flower were sighted and tour members were well pleased with their experience.