



Stocking the **FloraBank**

AN adequate supply of native seed is of great strategic significance in the fight against salinity, erosion, vegetation decline and loss of biodiversity. But the demand for native seed, coupled with poor growing seasons, has seen seed supplies dwindle.

In response to this dwindling supply, an information network called FloraBank has been set up to improve the availability and quality of native seed used for revegetation and conservation, and to provide technical support to community groups that collect, handle and store seed for revegetation.

FloraBank is administered by Greening Australia in partnership with the CSIRO Forestry and Forest Products' Australian Tree Seed Centre and the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

Now in its third year, FloraBank has published numerous guidelines on collecting, cleaning, drying, germinating, storing and testing the viability of native seeds. These are available on its web site at www.florabank.org.au.

The web site also enables users to search a list of seed suppliers, and facilitates the exchange of information between community groups and the project's partners.

In 2000, FloraBank's main project, in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Mining Environmental Research, was to gather information about the collection, germination, viability and propagation of Australian plants from published and unpublished sources, as well as experienced operators.

This information has been included on a CD-ROM database of 'Floradata', providing one of the largest sources of information on growing tropical, temperate and wetland plants, trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs. The CD-ROM will be published in March and will be free of charge.

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Finding the best fragments, before fragmentation

AGRICULTURAL activity in the Top End is on the rise, and includes plans to subdivide more than 2700-square-kilometres of savanna woodland in the Daly Basin, south-west of Darwin.

When the developers move in, many resident plants and animals will die or move on, as habitats become fragmented. Understanding the responses of different species to habitat fragmentation, however, could lessen the impact of development.

Dr Owen Price from the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory is surveying the animals and plants in 45 woodland fragments in one of Darwin's agricultural areas. The results will help him assess which areas of woodland should be conserved as habitat.

'The idea is to look at an area that's already been developed, to see what wildlife occurs in woodland patches in an

agricultural matrix,' he says. 'We can then work out which species like large or small fragments and isolated or connected fragments, and decide how to fragment a new landscape with minimal impact on the wildlife.'

Price is surveying mammals, reptiles and frogs in each fragment using 50 m by 50 m quadrats. Traps are used to collect animals such as quolls, possums and small marsupials, birds are sampled by observation, and botanists from the Herbarium identify plant species.

As well as the woodland fragments, the study has three types of control sites: areas of continuous savanna woodland, cleared land and mango orchards.

So far, the results of the study indicate that some species don't respond well to habitat fragmentation, preferring large areas of continuous woodland. Others fare better in highly connected fragments of

woodland than in continuous woodland. And for many species, even the smallest fragment or narrowest corridor is useful. Mango orchards, however, with their simplified vegetation structure, have little appeal to wildlife.

Price says the results of the survey may be used to advise government, developers and growers, and raise public awareness of the need to conserve woodland.

'We're trying to clearly lay out the consequences of habitat fragmentation and develop guidelines for the size and connectivity of remnant woodland, so that we can have an agricultural industry and, at the same time, keep the wildlife for which the Top End is famous,' he says.

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