

Volume Six
Number Two
November
2007

Conservation Science Western Australia

The translation of Diels 1906 *Plant Life in Western Australia* – editor's note

NEIL GIBSON^{1,2}

1) Science Division, Department of Environment and Conservation,
PO Box 51 Wanneroo WA 6065

2) School of Plant Biology, The University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway,
Crawley WA 6009

After some 100 years it has now been possible to publish for the first time a complete translation of Diel's seminal work on Western Australian biogeography (Diels 1906). The production of this translation has stretched over many decades and involved a number of people who recognized the need to provide an accessible version of the first major work on the ecology, vegetation and biogeography of Western Australian plants to an Australian audience.

Soon after his appointment as Head of the Department of Botany, University of Western Australia (now the School of Plant Biology within the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences) in 1947, Dr B.J. Grieve located a partially completed draft translation of Diels' work which had been commenced by Professor and Mrs W. Dakin after their arrival in the Biology Department of the University in 1914. Unfortunately, after they returned to England in 1920, the work largely lapsed. Some minor additions appears to have been undertaken on this manuscript by Dr D. Herbert and C.A. Gardner with copies dated 1927 lodged in library of the Western Australian Herbarium (Diels *et al.* 1927).

Appreciating the value of Diels' work for teaching and research purposes, Grieve completed a definitive translation which included updated taxonomy and ecological data. The typed manuscript, complete with illustrations from the original text, then served as a valuable source book in the Botany Department.

In due course, the desirability of obtaining permission to publish the translation arose and the matter was discussed with the University of Western Australia Press. Repeated attempts were then made to trace and contact the original publishing firm, W. Engelmann of Leipzig, or its possible successors in West Germany, but without success, and there the matter was forced to rest.

However, in 1981, Dr B.B. Lamont, who had independently commenced a translation of a chapter in the book relating to his researches, was, after much searching and correspondence, successful in contacting the new firm which had taken over the copyright for the book and he obtained formal permission to proceed with the translation. Learning of the existence of the Botany Department complete translation,

Lamont agreed to collaborate with Grieve, and later with the invaluable assistance of E.O. Hellmuth in jointly editing the work. In the same year Carr (1981) independently published a translation of a small section of Diel's work.

In an effort illustrate the vegetation changes since Diels' time, as many as possible of the original photographic sites that could be identified were visited and new photographs made by Lamont (Lamont & Grieve 1984). For purposes of comparison, these were placed in an appendix alongside the original plates. The publication of this work was unfortunately halted when funding could not be raised to publish the book and the project lapsed for quite some while.

The advent of widespread accessibility to digital media made it feasible in the early 21st century to publish this document in an electronic form with the kind permission of J. Cramer in Gebrüder Borntraeger Verlagsbuchhandlung. To that end Grieve's manuscript was edited and original figures and photographic plates scanned to complete this task.

Unfortunately Grieve's updated taxonomy and ecological data incorporated in his translation has seriously dated over the intervening 20 years. Therefore the original taxonomy and data published by Diels has been used in this translation. To assist the reader in understanding taxonomic changes an appendix of name changes current to 2002 has been added. Points of clarification are added to the text enclosed in [square brackets], but these have kept to a minimum. Translations of the captions of the tables and figures can be found in appendices.

With regard to the title of Diels' work, a direct translation from the German would be "The Plant World of Western Australia". We have chosen to translate this as "The Plant Life of Western Australia" to highlight the strong connection between the seminal work of Diels at the start of the 20th century with the other major work on Western Australian biogeography of the same name produced by Dr John Beard in the last decade of that millennium (Beard 1990). Beard has recently produced several papers highlighting the contribution of Diels during the centenary of his visit (Beard 2001a, 2001b).

Dr Beard and Dr Kilian (B) have also recently published further information on Diels and Pritzel's travels in eastern Australia in 1902 and are hoping be able to further expand this work in the future (Beard & Kilian 2003).

The electronic version of this translation had a limited release in June 2003. This current opportunity to provide a limited number of printed copies of Diels' work and an updated electronic version has been taken to provide easy access to this first major work on plant biogeography in Western Australia.

References

- Beard JS (1990) *Plant Life of Western Australia*. Kangaroo Press, Sydney.
- Beard JS (2001a) A historic vegetation map of Australia. *Austral Ecology* 26: 441–443.
- Beard JS (2001b) The botanists Diels and Pritzel in Western Australia: A centenary. *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia* 84:143–148.
- Beard JS, Kilian N (2003) Diels and Pritzel in Eastern Australia: Further information on their travels of 1902. *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of Australia* 33: 31–33
- Carr DJ (1981) Extra-Tropical Western Australia. In: *People and Plants in Australia* (eds D J & S G M Carr). Academic Press, Sydney, 47–78.
- Diels L (1906) *Die Pflanzenwelt von West-Australien südlich des Wendekreises*. Vegetation der Erde VII, Leipzig.
- Diels L, Darkin WJ, Herbert DA, Gardner CA. Unpublished manuscript dated 1927 held in the library of the Western Australian Herbarium
- Lamont BB, Grieve BJ (1984) Diels photographic sites – 82 years later: a study of resilience in southwestern Australia. *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Mediterranean Ecosystems. University of Western Australia, Nedlands*. pp. 91–92 & poster.