



Volunteer surveys for *Caladenia cristata*

By Andrew Brown

As part of the Adopt an Orchid project a dedicated group of volunteers from the West Australian Native Orchid Study and Conservation Group (WANOSCG) undertook comprehensive monitoring and surveys over a two-month period in 2011 to ascertain the current conservation status of the priority 1 (P1) species *Caladenia cristata*. The aims of the project were to:

- locate and survey known populations of the target orchid
- learn about its preferred habitat
- locate new populations
- identify actual and potential threats
- suggest conservation measures.

The species was first collected in September 1895 and named in 1923 from specimens collected the same year. A further collection was made in 1932 after which the species was not seen again until rediscovered in the Miling area in September 1986.

Following its rediscovery the species was listed as threatened flora but as substantial new populations were found near Three Springs in September 1991, it was subsequently down-listed to P1.

The orchid occurs in mostly small areas of remnant vegetation on gradual slopes and sandy rises encircling saline lakes and flats. Historically eight populations were known but, with the exception of those in the Three Springs area, most were small and rising salinity has decimated much of their habitat. Even the area of the Three Springs population has reduced dramatically in recent years.

As it was not known how many of these populations were still surviving, previously known sites between Coorow and Miling were visited by volunteers in August and September 2011. During these surveys all known habitat and some nearby areas of similar habitat were searched.

The species was located at three of the six previously known sites searched and a total of 932 flowering plants found. This sounds like a lot but 867 of them were in the one location with 38 and 27 found at the other two. No plants were located at three sites and it was noted that the habitat in these areas was highly degraded.

Two populations on private property were not surveyed in 2011 but with permission of the landholder it is hoped that these will be looked at in 2012.

Significantly, a new population of 35 flowering plants was located near Damboring.

Threats noted for current populations include rising salinity, grazing by rabbits and goats, weeds, degraded habitat and small population size.

Some 80 person hours were spent doing the surveys, a monumental effort conducted by volunteers at their own time and expense.

For more information contact Andrew on (08) 9334 0122 or email andrew.brown@dec.wa.gov.au.

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Above and left *Caladenia cristata*.

Photos – Andrew Brown