

Seeding Success: Community collaboration for plant conservation

K.P. Eyles¹, B.J. Desmond¹, and R. Miller^{2,*}

¹Australian Seed Bank Partnership, Canberra, Australia

²Royal Botanic Gardens of Victoria, Australia

*Corresponding author email: coordinator@seedpartnership.org.au

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Australia is home to more than 23,000 plant species, many of which occur nowhere else. Our plant biodiversity faces many threats, with more than 10% plant species now considered threatened. Australia's ex situ conservation collections provide plant material so we can better understand and restore native plant populations and landscapes. The plant material – germplasm – is stored as seeds in conservation seed banks, and as nursery and 'living plant' collections in botanic gardens. The immense scale and effort required to conserve our plant populations requires close collaboration and strong partnerships between government and non-government conservation organisations, indigenous and local communities. Australia has a national network of Seed Banks that bring collective expertise and experience to plant conservation. This partnership is working with local care groups, Indigenous land managers and private landholders to share skills and improve knowledge to conserve plant species. Using case studies from projects facilitated by the Partnership, this presentation will highlight the valuable and diverse roles that community can play, from stewardship of threatened plants, through to seed collection and propagation. In South Australia, seeds of the critically endangered Chalky Wattle (*Acacia cretacea*) were secured from the single known population on the Eyre Peninsula assisted by a local farmer whose father originally helped discover this species. This wild seed collection demonstrates the value of finely grained intergenerational knowledge and active land stewardship. In central Australia, cross-cultural learning is occurring between Anangu, Traditional Owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and plant scientists at the Australia National Botanic Gardens in Canberra. As well as working with Anangu to collect seed, Indigenous rangers visited Canberra to learn about seed banking and propagation techniques so they can establish a nursery on country. These exciting collaborations show that plant conservation is more effective in partnership with local communities and land managers.