

Red Swainson-pea

Swainsona plagiotropis

A Nationally Threatened Species of the Grassland Community

Description

Red Swainson-pea (*Swainsona plagiotropis*) is a prostrate perennial herb growing up to 200mm tall. It has green leaves which are 5-10mm long, lance shaped, sparsely hairy below and hairless above. Flowers are pea-like, bright red (fading to violet) with a distinctly upwardly curving keel.

Flowering occurs throughout spring, after which pods containing up to 12 seeds form. It seasonally dies back over summer, resembling the characteristics of an annual, remaining dormant for several months only to re-sprout from woody rootstock after the following autumn break.

Habitat

Red Swainson-pea is generally found in remnants of the Northern Plains Grasslands community on red to brown clay loams and clay soils that are usually seasonally waterlogged; annual rainfall between 350-450 mm.

Such remnants are generally where cultivation, irrigation and other such development is absent, and where grazing has been frequent but not too intense, however there are exceptions.

Distribution

Red Swainson-pea is restricted to the Riverine Plains of south-eastern Australia. In Victoria, most populations occur south and west of Echuca in the Victorian Riverina Bioregion.



Source: Flora Information System, DSE 2004.

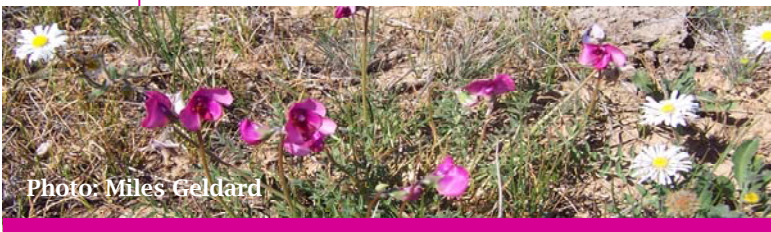


Photo: Miles Geldard



Photo: John Eichler

Red Swainson-pea *Swainsona plagiotropis*



Flower and seed pod.

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Conservation status

Red Swainson-pea has been classified as 'Endangered' under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the 'EPBC Act') and is also listed as 'Endangered' under the State *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (the 'FFG Act').

Decline and threats

The decline in Red Swainson-pea is a direct result of habitat loss. To help maintain the current population size of the species it is best to avoid broadscale herbicide use and soil disturbance by mechanical intervention.

Better management

Grassland vegetation must be maintained in a relatively open state so that Red Swainson-pea associates are not suppressed by more competitive plants (particularly perennial tussock grasses such as *Austrodanthonia* and *Austrostipa* species and annual exotics like *Avena*, *Bromus*, *Vulpia* and *Lolium* species). Anecdotal evidence suggests that light sheep grazing is successful in maintaining grasslands in a desired state for Red Swainson-pea reproduction.

Similar species

Red Swainson-pea is similar in appearance to several other grassland Swainson-peas including Slender Darling-pea (*Swainsona murrayana*), Southern Swainson-pea (*Swainsona behriana*), Broughton Pea (*Swainsona procumbens*) and Downy Swainson-pea (*Swainsona swainsonoides*).



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1. Southern Swainson-pea. Photo: John Eichler.
2. Broughton Pea. Photo: Viridans Biological Database.
3. Downy Swainson-pea. Photo: John Eichler.
4. Slender darling-pea. Photo: Miles Geldard.

Why are threatened species important?

- Conservation of biodiversity is essential to maintaining ecosystem processes such as nutrient cycling, carbon dioxide / oxygen balance and control of pests and diseases, all of which underpin the economic viability and sustainability of our primary industries
- Currently we rely on about 20 plant species to feed the majority of the world's population - the conservation of the wild plant gene pool is essential to supplement the narrow genetic base of these food crops, providing disease resistance, improved productivity, and environmental tolerance
- Biological diversity is an intrinsic part of the aesthetic qualities in many areas valued in Australia for tourism and recreation
- Extinction is forever...



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