



Friday 7 September 2012

Seed banks supporting the recovery of threatened species

This National Threatened Species Day the Australian Seed Bank Partnership is starting a landmark conservation project to provide an insurance policy for Australia's endangered plants.

The Australian Seed Bank Partnership's *1,000 Species Project* will collect and store seed from plants across Australia and its external territories – from the spectacular Eyre Peninsula in South Australia to Norfolk Island's rainforests.

The Australian National Botanic Gardens as a proud member of the Australian Seed Bank Partnership assists in seed germination of rare and threatened species so as to ensure their survival in the wild. The Gardens' seed bank manager Tom North says many of the plants to be collected are unique or of huge ecological significance to Australia.

"This project delivers long-term conservation of a diverse range of species and will help us understand how to restore these plants to the wild, making sure our plant species are not lost for future generations," Tom said.

"We're initially going to look at 1,000 plants we don't have in Australia's seed banks. For the next 12 months, our partners across Australia will be collecting seeds in places as diverse as the wheatbelt of Western Australia to the alpine and sub-alpine regions of the south-eastern states.

"Australia is a mega-diverse country, with 10 per cent of the world's plant species, 80 per cent of which aren't found anywhere else in the world. The *1,000 Species Project* is going to make a difference to ensuring the survival of our precious plants through the national distributed network of seed banks."

As part of the project, the Australian National Botanic Gardens is gearing up to work with Norfolk Island National Park staff to help them deliver on the recovery plan for the island's plants.

Tom North will be training the national park staff on how to collect seeds, to set up their own seed bank and to store and preserve seeds for the long term.

"Plants and animals that have evolved on an island like Norfolk can be more vulnerable to threats like weeds and loss of habitat. The island's ecology has changed dramatically since European settlement and this may be why there are now challenges with growing some species unique to the island."

The Australian Seed Bank Partnership's *1000 Species Project* is being supported in part by the Millennium Seed Bank Partnership at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in the United Kingdom.

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