

Mountain Swainson-pea

Swainsona recta

Bringing an endangered plant back from extinction

Historic and current distribution

Formerly widespread in south-eastern Australia with a range extending from north-eastern Victoria northwards along the western slopes of New South Wales, Mountain Swainson-pea (also known as Small Purple-pea) *Swainsona recta* is now considered extinct in the wild in Victoria, with surviving populations being in NSW and ACT. Historical Victorian sites (based on herbarium collections) include Echuca, Murchison, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Tallangatta. The last known extant Victorian population in Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park consisted of four clones from one plant that died in 2012.



Swainsona recta in flower Photo: Eileen Collins

Biology and Ecology

Swainsona recta predominantly occurs in grassy woodlands but occasionally extends to grassy open-forest, open-heath or shrub land habitat from generally flat to undulating terrains in red-brown, grey gritty or stony loams. It does not favour a particular aspect and has an altitudinal range from 180m to 960m.

Swainsona recta is a perennial forb that flowers in spring, peaking in October with the seed (pods) ripening between early and late December. Afterwards, the plant dies back to perennial rootstock until re-sprouting again the following autumn/winter.

Threats

The range reduction and decline in population size is believed to be due to both adult mortality and low recruitment, occurring in response to several major threat factors. These are:

- habitat loss due to pasture improvement and other agricultural developments;
- grazing from introduced and native species;
- biomass competition (native and introduced perennial grasses) and other weeds;
- reduced fire frequency (resulting in excessive groundcover species competition);
- railway maintenance, road works and urban development / disturbance;
- invertebrates browsing plants, flowers and pods in small populations.

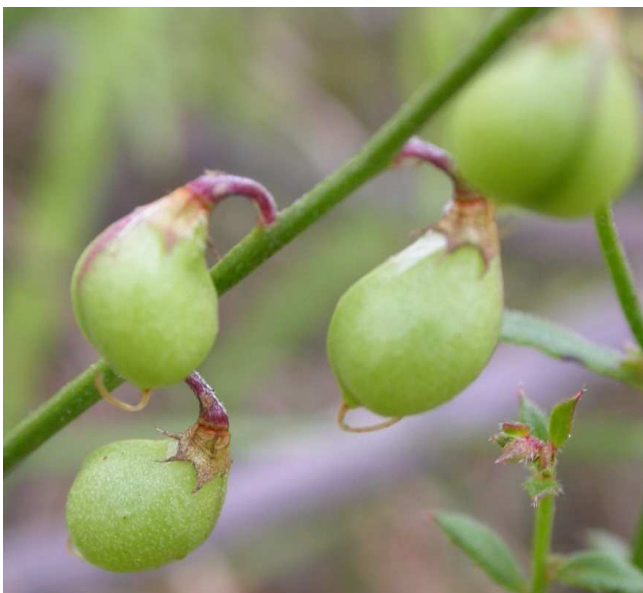
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Conservation status

- Classified as Endangered in Victoria (DELWP Advisory List of Rare or Threatened Plants in Victoria).
- Listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.
- Classified as Nationally Endangered under the Commonwealth legislation *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- Listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

What is being done?

DEWLP (Hume Region) aims to re-establish genetically viable *Swainsona recta* populations in secure public and private sites within the species known North Eastern Victorian range. A key focus is the re-introduction of the species within the most recent extant location: Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park.



Swainsona recta pods

Photo: Eileen Collins

Plants raised from genetically viable seed collected from relatively large populations in New South Wales

have been propagated at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne.



Swainsona recta seedlings

Photo: Glen Johnson

The re-introductions will encompass a range of Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) consistent with historical locations. All translocation sites will be of medium to high quality, but there will be variations in aspect, topography, soils, native/exotic composition and degree of bare ground and biomass in order to determine the optimal site characteristics for future translocation programs.

Project Support

This project is jointly funded through DELWP Hume Region/Victorian Government and the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.

Further information:

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