

# ABC News

## Hidden in plain sight, the endangered Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorhynchoides*) makes a revival

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As trains rattle past, daisies are pushing up through the soil on three vacant blocks next to the Sunbury line.

But far from a euphemism about death, these particular daisies embody a rare survival story.

So precious are the small plants, the state government does not want their location revealed and they are secured behind 2-metre high fences.

The brilliantly named Button Wrinklewort, an endangered wildflower, exists in fewer than 30 known locations across Victoria, NSW and the ACT.

By chance, one of those spots is on a state-owned land reserve in Melbourne's north-west, surrounded by train tracks, roads, a school and suburban homes.

With protection and careful management, site manager Ash Deans said endangered native grasslands and plant species in the property like the Button Wrinklewort and spiny rice flower were beginning to thrive again.

"We don't get too many opportunities to be involved in the management of a site like this," Mr Deans said.

"At certain times a year, you'll see fields of purples, pinks, yellows and whites.

"It's just the different flowers and native herbs. The overall site benefits from what we are doing here."

Mr Deans, an environmental officer with the Department of Transport, said 14 Button Wrinklewort plants were recorded on the reserve about six years ago, when a level crossing removal was completed.

Through careful management, the population has increased to about 40. The department has started planting a further 100 seedlings which were propagated-off site.

A seedling with small green shoots

To some degree, the Button Wrinklewort can consider itself lucky.

The species is re-emerging after garnering a cult following among conservationists along the volcanic plains in the state's west. A solitary Button Wrinklewort next to a country road even has its own Facebook page.

Other native flora across Australia have continued a slow decay towards extinction, mostly unnoticed by the wider public.

Last year, researchers from the University of Queensland found that between 1995 and 2017, the populations of 112 plant species had declined an average of 72 per cent.

Scientist Hugh Possingham, one of the project leaders of the annual Threatened Species Index, said land clearing, development, agriculture and

wild animals were largely to blame for the grim outlook for many endangered plants.

"It's not unlike many other threatened groups like birds and mammals. They're heading rapidly towards extinction," he said.

Professor Possingham, who is also Queensland's chief scientist, said the cost of saving a threatened plant species was often less than \$100,000.

Much of the grunt work of planting and weeding could be done by volunteers, he said.

"From a return-on-investment perspective, investing in recovery of threatened plants is probably the smartest thing Australia could be doing with respect to the environment," Professor Possingham said.

"We have over 3,000 threatened plant species. Some have nobody looking after them."