Farm flora sanctuaries

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of cotton bush, for although both it and flannel bush are nutritious they do not persist during drought, and do not help sheep survive in these difficult times. On the other hand, most of the better shrubs maintain some leaves through a drought. It is for this reason that we believe that the regeneration of shrubs is well worth some effort.

Pastoralists who follow the Department of Agriculture’s recommendations for spelling the country in good seasons can expect an increase in the shrub population. A return to full production cannot be expected immediately; this is a state which is only achieved gradually, but it is something which can be looked forward to if these stocking policies are incorporated in the management programme.

The greatly increased insurance against drought more than repays any efforts made to regenerate the fodder shrubs in the Murchison.

FARM FLORA SANCTUARIES

By R. D. ROYCE, B.Sc. (Agric.), Officer in Charge, Botany Branch

NOW that several species of native plants have become totally extinct and many more are becoming rare almost to the point of extinction, interest in the scientific and aesthetic potential of the West Australian flora is awakening.

People in all walks of life are taking a very real interest in our unique native plants.

Much new land is being opened up for agriculture each year. No one, however enthusiastic he may be for the preservation of the flora, can argue against the necessity for agricultural expansion. But most of the new development is taking place in just those areas which have for years been internationally famous for the wealth of their wildflowers, and have long been the mecca of taxonomic botanists from all parts of the world.

It is a common sight today to see thousands of acres of black kangaroo paws, featherflowers, Qualup bells, bottlebrushes; Christmas trees and even Albany pitcher plants being ploughed in to make way for subterranean clover or potatoes.

Unless provision is made for the reservation of comparatively large areas of the natural habitat of these fast-disappearing plants, they will very soon cease to exist at the present rate of agricultural development.

In a country the size of Western Australia there is certainly enough land to provide the necessary reserves as well as an adequate area for agriculture.

The broad issues of conservation and preservation of the native wildflowers are the responsibility of the Government, but farmers in particular can do a lot to assist. Probably the best way of giving assistance is to retain areas of virgin scrub as flora sanctuaries on the farm.

These could have a number of advantages.

Firstly, the new land now being opened up is largely gently undulating and of a sandy nature. It is possible that after cultivation for a number of years, the soil in some of these districts may become subject to erosion and then the cry will be for vegetation cover to conserve the soil. Why not preserve vegetation in the original planning of the farm layout.

Provision should be made for broad areas along fence lines to be left uncleared to provide this protection. Where these are left within paddock areas sheep grazing will eventually thin out the cover very considerably, and if they are to be retained permanently they should be fenced in as unit areas to protect them from grazing.

In new districts this is not difficult, and areas of virgin country would not only help to protect the soil, but would also increase the attractiveness of the property.
and enhance its resale value. On the other hand, bushland around the homestead as well as in the paddocks would make living conditions more pleasant and would add a source of lively interest and enjoyment for all members of the family, while if preserved against grazing it would be an asset to the district.

On many properties too, there are rough hilly spots, ironstone ridges, breakaways and steep slopes which at best are of doubtful agricultural value.

Where the vegetation is cleared from these areas the soil on the slopes is left vulnerable to gully erosion, and little use can be made of what soil remains.

In their natural condition these rough hills are frequently extremely interesting and valuable botanically, since many of them support vegetation which differs from that of adjacent country.

In many instances too, gravelly ridges contain toxic plants which may not be found elsewhere on the property. By fencing off these areas as sanctuaries, the farmer not only protects his stock from sudden death but preserves both the soil and the vegetation for the enjoyment of future generations.

There are also very real scientific benefits to be derived from retaining areas of virgin bush on farms. The more such areas that can be preserved the greater is the chance of being able to save a large proportion of the native wildflowers which are not only completely unique but also are of very great importance to the scientific world.

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