



MEDIA RELEASE - 31st October 2023

A milestone in conservation of the rare Crowded leek-orchid

Newly discovered healthy populations of the rare Crowded leek-orchid, *Paraprasophyllum crebriflorum*, have contributed seeds to the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre (TSCC) in Hobart, marking a milestone in the conservation of the species. The orchids were discovered growing on high conservation-value native grasslands at Surrey Hills in north-west Tasmania, when Forico, who manage the grasslands, were working to rehabilitate the area.

In a report to Forico, Dr Magali Wright of the Landscape Recovery Foundation outlines the results and significance of the seed collection, which resulted from collaboration with Forico, ecologist Mark Wapstra of ECOtas, ecological consultant Kerri Spicer and Threatened Plants Tasmania.

Gatcomb South forms part of a mosaic of grasslands and other native forest which Forico manages for conservation and biodiversity values. In 2018, the company began working to rehabilitate Gatcomb South grassland from its shrubland state, in an operational trial. The goal was to return the area to a vibrant grassland, using burning techniques echoing the practice used by Aboriginal peoples over tens of thousands of years.

Over a five-year period, management intervention has significantly improved the condition of the grassland, with annual monitoring by Mark Wapstra and Kerri Spicer showing clear improvements in its health and condition. An unexpected outcome of the annual monitoring program was the discovery of a healthy population of the endangered Crowded leek-orchid. Increased numbers of the species were located by volunteers from Threatened Plants Tasmania, a volunteer organisation facilitating conservation and monitoring of Tasmania's threatened plants, who visit Surrey Hills every January.

Under instruction from Dr Wright, Forico's Sustainability and Fire Management Coordinator Adam Crook and Sustainability Advisor Ann La Sala assisted in the orchid seed collection for the Tasmanian Orchid Conservation and Research Program. This is hosted by the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre, a seed banking facility located in a purpose-built laboratory at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens (RTBG) in Hobart.



Besides being submitted for long-term storage and seed-banking, the seed was germinated with mycorrhizal fungi, also collected at Surrey Hills, under laboratory conditions. The surviving seedlings were grown on in potting media in the RTBG. When they reach maturity these plants will be used to bolster seed collections in the TSCC and can be used to help support future translocation efforts for the species if required. Dr Wright reports that of the 23 seedlings planted, two plants survived a summer dormancy and emerged in cultivation in 2023. The propagation will continue in years to come.

“This represents a significant achievement for the conservation of the species, with the first collection of seed and mycorrhizal fungi stored in the TSCC and the first successful germination of the species” says Dr Wright.

Dr Wright’s report outlines future recommendations to achieve robust conservation outcomes which will fit with the overall conservation needs of the species and align with Forico values.

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