IMLAY MALLEE-a critically endangered tree

by Bob Ross

Last year when I told John Aitken, our NSW Region president, that I was planning to write articles on endangered native plants for the "Native Plants" magazine, John suggested I include 'growing native plants' as one of the strategies for saving native species from extinction.

It does make sense that an organisation like ours would be interested in propagating plants that are endangered – after all, growing Australian plants is really what our Society is best at doing!

But there could be a problem if we just grow an endangered native and stick it in our own garden. When we eventually have to sell our lovely patch of native plants and move to the retirement village, most likely the new owners will convert what was a beautiful garden of native plants (including a few endangered native species) into a kikuyu lawn so the kids can practice footy on the weekend.

However there are other reasons for propagating endangered natives, and I don't just mean the example of the mass propagating of Wollemi pines (to help protect the secret location of the original trees in Wollemi NP). An excellent example is the Imlay mallee planting on the top of Mt. Imlay in late September 2011.

The Imlay mallee (*Eucalyptus imlayensis*) was listed as 'critically endangered' in 2009 by the Scientific Committee established under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act. At that time the only population of this smooth-barked mallee consisted of 80 mature trees on a steep slope on the top of Mt. Imlay, in Mt. Imlay National Park, in south-eastern NSW. Mt. Imlay is an isolated peak surrounded by much lower hills and the single location of the trees is near the top, at an elevation of 850 metres. How they got there is a mystery, but they may be a remnant left over from the period when this part of Australia was much cooler.

(Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)

The problem of protecting the isolated location of Imlay mallees was complicated by the lack of seed on the trees, no young trees coming up, and an infestation of the soil-borne pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi* on the top of the mountain that had already killed other native plant species.

The Australian National Botanic Gardens worked with NSW National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS) Ranger Lyn Evans and other NPWS staff to propagate new seedlings of the eucalypt, and in late September 2011 a team of people (including three APS members) planted 23 seedlings of *E imlayensis* on the top of Mt. Imlay as part of a trial. Lyn reports that so far all 23 seedlings are surviving.