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FROM LITTLE ORCHIDS BIG THINGS GROW

More than 6,000 orchids from three endangered species will be propagated at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria over the next few years in a project supported by Murray Local Land Services.

Australia boasts over 1,800 species of orchids, but many face extinction without proper management. The sand-hill spider-orchid (*Caladenia arenaria*), crimson spider-orchid (*Caladenia concolor*), and Oaklands diuris (*Diuris callitrophila*) are all listed as endangered under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act*. Through the Wild Orchids Project, a consortium of groups and organisations are working together to save these species.

Dr Noushka Reiter, who manages the Orchid Conservation Program at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, said their strategies included reintroduction, which involves studying the ecology of the species.

“For orchids, we focus on their pollinators and mycorrhizal associations,” she said

“We are fortunate to have witnessed pollination this year in all three species of orchids and will begin the task of determining the pollinators’ presence at potential reintroduction sites next spring.

“Our dedicated team of staff and volunteers at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Orchid Conservation Program has now germinated hundreds of seedlings with their mycorrhizal fungi.

“These new orchids will be used to boost existing populations and establish new ones.”

The Wild Orchids project is a 10-year effort to conserve these orchids in the wild.

Funded through the NSW Environmental Trust Saving our Species Partnership Grants, the project is a partnership between Murray Local Land Services, Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Primary Industries – Land, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Australian Network for Plant Conservation, Forestry Corporation of NSW, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services and the community.

Over the next decade the project will include other key activities such as the installation of fencing and other infrastructure, weed management, community education and monitoring the orchid populations.

Orchids are among the most beautiful and mysterious of all Australian native flowering plants. They are often called ‘jewels of the bush’, a testament to their unique flowers, which bloom for only a few weeks of the year. Orchid enthusiasts have begun flocking to the Oaklands and Urana area where the Oaklands diuris is in flower until late November.

(...Ends.)

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Photo caption - (from left to right) Helen Waudby (OEH), Geoff Roberston (OEH) and Dr Noushka Reiter (Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria) checking out the newest additions to the nursery.