



MEDIA RELEASE

Millennium Seed Bank 12 Month Collection Target Reached

Scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) are part of a team that has collected more than a million seeds throughout arid Australia to be deposited into a global seed bank.

The team, including staff from the Alice Springs Desert Park and the Royal Botanical Gardens, based in Kew in the United Kingdom, has spent much of the past year collecting the seeds of 100 of Australia's arid plant species as part of The Millennium Seed Bank Project.

The project aims to collect 10 per cent of the world's seed-bearing flora by 2010 and safeguard 24,000 global plants species from extinction.

NRETA botanist Catherine Nano said the project's first annual seed collection was a successful milestone.

"We are on track to meet our quota of 550 species during five years," she said.

"We are working as part of a larger international team of dry land countries including Jordan and the United States to collect 10,000 seeds for each species, some of which are threatened or unique to NT.

"We need to collect 10,000 good quality seeds per species. Some species are very easy to collect like grasses but other plants such as those characterised by spiny fruits are a little more time consuming."

NRETA seed biologist Katherine Baker said half the batch collected this year would be sent to the Royal Botanical Gardens, in Kew, in the United Kingdom, for long-term storage in the international seed bank.

"The project aims to encourage plant conservation throughout the world by facilitating access to and transfer of seed conservation technology," she said.

"The other half will remain in the NT for storage and research, so we can learn about desert plant germination requirements in relation to a range of environmental pressures such as unpredictable rainfall, fire, weed invasion and climate change.

"The project will significantly increase the knowledge about the ecology of Territory plants as well as substantially develop the Territory's capacity to undertake seed collections, processing, banking and research programs."

Ms Baker said the project would be a great opportunity to promote public interest in plant conservation, with many people involved in the collection and cleaning process.

Collection will continue towards reaching the quota for March 2007 and the research phase will now commence on the species collected.

Ends

Media Note - For more information contact Katherine Baker on 8951 8281 or Catherine Nano on 89 51 8222.

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