

Media Release



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Study shows oil mallees improve farm biodiversity

A study has shown that farmers can enjoy the benefits of greater biodiversity on their farms by planting oil mallees.

The findings come from a three-year study by the Future Farm Industries CRC (FFI CRC) into oil mallee farming systems in the central wheatbelt.

FFI CRC Researcher Dr Patrick Smith (CSIRO) said the study showed that oil mallees provide important resources for wildlife living in farming landscapes.

“Mallees provide shelter and food for native wildlife in what otherwise can be a hostile environment,” Dr Smith said. “If enough mallees are planted, they can make a significant contribution to the conservation of a large range of native species.

Hundreds of insect species and spiders that normally inhabit bushland colonise mallee plantations and improve paddock health. Many of these species are the natural predators of agricultural pests, and others help cycle nutrients and water. These insects in turn become food sources for larger animals such as birds, reptiles and small mammals.

The profuse mallee blossoms attract insects and birds and even rare mammals such as the tiny western pygmy possum.

“This improved on-farm biodiversity has the potential to reduce pests by providing more habitat for natural predators such as beetles, wasps and spiders,” Dr Smith said.

Dr Smith’s research has found that oil mallee plantations provide food and shelter for about two-thirds of the region’s bird species, more than half of the local reptiles and hundreds of native invertebrates.

Two endangered species, the woylie (*Bettongia penicillata*) and the wambenger (*Phascogale tapoatafa*), were among half a dozen small mammals found foraging in oil mallee plantations located in Western Australia’s central wheatbelt.

“Oil mallees can never replace bush as primary habitat but they are certainly a helpful supplement,” Dr Smith said.

Dr Smith will be presenting a public lecture on the *Biodiversity Benefits of Oil Mallees* at the CSIRO Centre for Environment and Life Sciences (CELS) located 65 Brockway Rd, Floreat on 23 April starting at 4pm. It’s free to attend. Please email greg.lawrence@futurefarmcrc.com.au to confirm attendance.

A copy of the *Biodiversity Benefits of Oil Mallees* fact sheet can be downloaded at:
http://www.futurefarmcrc.com.au/documents/Biodiversitybenefitsofoilmallees_000.pdf

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