

Merimbula Star-Hair: an endangered native plant in our area

By Bob Ross



Merimbula Star-hair about to flower
(Astrotricha sp. Wallagaraugh)
Photo taken last November by Bob Ross

Australian native plants are varied and fascinating as well as beautiful, and we think they are largely responsible for making Australia such a beautiful and fascinating place to live.

Wendy and I also think we all – as residents of Australia - have a responsibility to try to understand and look after our wonderful Australian flora. So when we recently learned that there is an ‘endangered’ species of native plant that is literally growing in our back yard, we took a special interest in it.

The common name of this native is the Merimbula Star-hair. According to the NSW Dept. of Environment and Heritage, it is different from other Star-hair species but hasn’t been formally described. The Department’s website says the Star-hair has “a highly restricted and severely fragmented distribution, currently known from only two localities [in NSW] about 50 km apart.” One site is SE of Eden, deep in the forest, and the other site is in and around Tura Beach, where we live. It is also found around Mallacoota in Victoria. The flowering period of this star-hair is late spring (October to December) and the plants can grow to over a metre high.

Our local Landcare group has just received a grant from the local Council to survey where the Star-hair

plants are found. We think it likes to grow in disturbed areas and on the edge of forested areas. The soil in our area is deep white sand, apparently deposited by the wind during the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago. We don’t know why the Star-hair is just found in these two spots in NSW, but we hope that as we find out more about it we will be able to work out a plan to make sure that it doesn’t go from the ‘endangered’ list to the list of ‘extinct’ species.