

Canberra nature lovers map out endangered species online

666 ABC Canberra By Tegan Osborne

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A new online partnership between citizen botanists and local plant experts is helping to map the locations of many endangered plant species in Canberra, one photo at a time.

Canberra Nature Map is the brainchild of Aaron Clausen, and allows would-be botanists in the territory to report rare and endangered species, by posting photos of their bushwalk findings online.

By uploading photos to Canberra Nature Map, nature enthusiasts can get in contact with scientists and experts in local flora, who can help them identify the species.

Mr Clausen, an IT specialist by profession, created the site last year after stumbling upon some native orchids at Mount Majura during a mountain bike ride.

"It was quite an interesting epiphany moment for me ... I pulled over one day just to have a bit of a rest, looked around me and just couldn't believe what I was standing in the middle of.

"All these bright yellow orchids and the a couple of purple ones," he told 666 ABC Canberra's Adam Shirley.

"Then looking a bit further I realised these were very unusual spider orchids that were very different to anything I'd seen before. I was literally almost riding on them and stepping on them."

Through research he discovered the spider orchids were the most critically endangered species in the ACT, and from there his interest grew.

"It made me get in touch with a couple of other local experts, the Friends of Mt Majura and also I got in touch with Dr Michael Mulvaney from the ACT Government," he said.

"I started getting their advice and taking more and more photos of plants and asking questions ... and before long I had so many photos and so many species that they just began piling up."

And so Canberra Nature Map was born.

Significant discoveries made with the help of nature enthusiasts

The site kicked off in December last year and has since gathered 100 users, some amateurs and some experts, and more than 5,000 images.

"It's quite amazing and it's been really powerful ... It's a combination of nature experts and nature lovers all coming together," Mr Clausen said.

One of the site's users, Michael Bedingfield, has reported the only currently known location of a species called the Trim Flat-Sedge within the ACT.



PHOTO: A Canberra Spider Orchid, or *Arachnorchis actensis*, at Mount Majura. (Supplied: Aaron Clausen)

EXTERNAL LINK: [Canberra Nature Map](#)

MAP: [Canberra 2600](#)



PHOTO: Aaron Clausen, founder of Canberra Nature Map. (Supplied)

That sighting has attracted interest from the ACT Government and the CSIRO, who have seen first-hand the power of the website.

"We've had a lot of help to get there. There's been a lot of support from the ACT Government, the Conservation, Planning and Research unit," said Mr Clausen.

"They've supplied data to backfill some of the previous sightings.

"This year alone... we've been able to confirm three new species of orchids, just on Mount Majura."

Topics: animals-and-nature, science-and-technology, canberra-2600, act

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