
MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia's only First Nations-led wildflower festival explores the hidden stories of Esperance's coast

Every spring, Kepa Kurl (Esperance) bursts into colour as thousands of wildflowers bloom across one of the world's most botanically diverse landscapes.

The Esperance region is home to around 2,500 native flowering plant species — more than entire countries like Ireland and New Zealand, making the region one of Australia's most botanically diverse wildflower destinations.

From 19–23 September, this season will be celebrated at Australia's only First Nations-led wildflower festival. The Djilba Wildflower Festival is hosted by the Wudjari people through Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (ETNTAC).

What sets the Djilba Wildflower Festival apart is not only the 750 different wildflowers on display, but the opportunity to understand them within the landscape and culture they belong to. The Djilba festival brings Wudjari knowledge together with botanical expertise, environmental research, art and community education to explore Country from different perspectives.

This year's theme, Sand Dunes and Seashore, explores the connections between coastal plants, marine ecosystems and Wudjari cultural knowledge, as well as the ancient landscapes now submerged beneath the Recherche Archipelago.

ETNTAC Healthy Country Program Coordinator Jennell Reynolds said the theme was an opportunity to look beyond the plants traditionally associated with wildflower season and consider the coastal ecosystem as a whole.

ETNTAC Healthy Country Program Coordinator, Jennell Reynolds

"Just because they're in the sea water doesn't mean they aren't flowering plants. There are plants that stabilise the dunes and right down to the seashore where you'll see how important seagrasses are and how important that is for the ecosystem. Wudjari people don't see sea and land as different, they are all connected, no boundaries. We have plants in both, and we need to learn about and look after them like any other ecosystem."

That connection will be explored in depth on Presenters Day, Sunday 20 September, through talks and workshops spanning ancient coastlines, marine ecology, local flora, citizen science and botanical art.

Landscape and Community Archaeologist David Guilfoyle will present *Stories Written in Sand: Sediment Archives from the Wudjari Ancient Coastlines Program, Recherche Archipelago*, exploring how sediments can reveal thousands of years of environmental and cultural history.

ETNTAC Landscape and Community Archaeologist, Dave Guilfoyle

"It might be fair to say we have the best wildflowers growing next to the best beaches in the world. But beneath all that colour and beauty is another story — the sand itself. We feel it's about time we understand where those sands and sediments came from, the journeys they've been on, and the stories they can tell us about Country and its changing coastline over thousands of years."

Through the Wudjari Ancient Coastlines Program, researchers are using sand and sediment collected across the Recherche Archipelago to piece together what Wudjari Country looked like thousands of years ago, when sea levels were lower and many of today's islands were connected to the mainland by an extensive coastal plain.

The research brings together sediment analysis, seabed mapping, underwater archaeology and environmental reconstruction with Wudjari cultural knowledge to better understand how the coastline has changed and provide a baseline for its future management.

Presenters Day will also feature UWA Emeritus Professor Gary Kendrick exploring how seagrasses flower beneath the ocean, while Kahree Garnaut will examine the ecological role of seaweed, seagrass and beach wrack.

The festival begins with a lively Opening Day on Saturday 19 September, featuring the wildflower display alongside flower crowns, face painting, nature play, community storytelling, recycled flower making, Clay Pollen Sculptures, live music and the announcement of the school and open art competition winners.

ETNTAC Community Development Coordinator Dr Jane Mulcock said ETNTAC has hosted the festival since 2024, building on its long history as a community event alongside festival partners Esperance Wildflower Society, St Andrew's Anglican Parish and Esperance Community Arts.

ETNTAC Community Development Coordinator, Dr Jane Mulcock

"This festival is a wonderful example of what can happen when community organisations come together with a shared passion for celebrating our environment. It is an opportunity to showcase the incredible biodiversity of the Esperance region while creating meaningful experiences for people of all ages."

Visitors can expect:

- A spectacular wildflower display featuring more than 750 species, alongside botanical and environmental displays
- Wudjari Ancient Coastlines displays and presentations exploring the changing landscape of the Recherche Archipelago
- Guest speakers and workshops exploring seagrasses, coastal ecology, local flora and environmental science
- Flower crowns, face painting, nature play and a digital photo booth
- Art exhibitions, botanical art, clay pollen sculptures and community installations
- Live music, storytelling, craft stalls and hands-on activities

The festival continues to play an important role in environmental and cultural education, engaging local schools, artists and community members while also welcoming visitors eager to discover one of Western Australia's most abundant wildflower regions.

Coinciding with the close of the Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show, the two events together provide an opportunity to experience the floral diversity of Western Australia's south coast.

Whether you're a keen botanist, nature lover, photographer or simply looking for an unforgettable spring experience, the Djilba Wildflower Festival offers something for everyone.

Festival details

Location	Esperance Civic Centre and St Andrew's Anglican Parish
Dates	19 to 23 September 2026
Tickets	Entry by donation
Website	https://www.esperancewildflowerfestival.com/

Email	esperancewildflowerfestival@gmail.com
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