



MEDIA RELEASE

December 2016

Botanists confident they've discovered new plant species in pristine Victorian rainforest

The species discovery program Bush Blitz may have revealed the existence of a new plant previously undocumented by science near Victoria's Mallacoota Inlet.

Botanist Neville Walsh from the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is confident he's discovered a new species of native violet (*Viola*).

Neville Walsh, with RBGV colleagues, found the intriguing cascading herb during a Bush Blitz of Croajingolong National Park in east Gippsland.

While searching along the banks of Dowell creek, an easy hike from the Marshmead outdoor education campus owned by Methodist Ladies' College (MLC), Neville and fellow botanists entered a pristine patch of rainforest. Nestled against the bank of the creek in all its flowering glory was this delicate plant.

"This little plant certainly doesn't match any known species," Walsh said. "It could be a hybrid, but I can't imagine what it could be with. I will grow a cohort of seedlings to see if they breed true and that should prove if it is a hybrid or not, but I'm thinking most likely not.

"I'm not claiming a new species yet, but I'm quietly confident".

Bush Blitz manager Jo Harding said they were operating just 10-kilometres north of Mallacoota but the vegetation was so dense that helicopters were needed to access the area.

"It is remarkable that a new species of *Viola* may have been found just a short hike from the Marshmead base camp," Ms Harding said. "It shows new species are all around us, with a massive 75 per cent of Australia's biodiversity still un-known to science. The Bush Blitz program, managed by Parks Australia, has discovered more than 1,200 new species so far.

At the Croajingolong National Park Bush Blitz, Parks Victoria rangers worked closely with scientists from Museum Victoria, the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and the University of NSW to access this barely touched wilderness area. As well as the potentially new *Viola*, many new records were made of rare species of plants and insects, some not previously recorded from Victoria.

"Croajingolong National Park is one of Australia's most spectacular parks and it was a fantastic opportunity for our rangers to be involved in the Bush Blitz program. They had the opportunity to visit areas that may have only been previously seen by traditional owners," said Parks Victoria's Will McCutcheon.

Bush Blitz is Australia's largest species discovery program and is a partnership between the Australian Government, BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities and Earthwatch.

Images can be found at www.bushblitz.org.au/media-centre/

Media contacts:

Jo Harding – Bush Blitz Manager (Parks Australia) – (02) 6250 9442 or 0459 804 796