

CAPRICORN CAVES

THREATENED SPECIES RECOVERY PROGRAM

Tectaria Devexa var devexa is a small tufted terrestrial fern growing in very thin pockets of soil on the cave walls where there is sufficient natural light and moisture, It has retreated to the cave entrance due to increased aridity and seasonal climatic fluctuations. Although widely distributed in Sri Lanka, SE Asia and Vanuatu, the Caves district is the only known site in Australia, significantly separated from the closest population by thousands of miles. This relic population at Capricorn Caves declined to near extinction in 2006 with only 21 plants.

Greening Australia secured a grant under the Threatened species recovery program in partnership with Queensland Herbarium, Griffith university and Society for Growing Native plants. Funding was secured from the WWF to save the fern.

- **Stage one** was to reproduce more ferns in a controlled environment at Heaton's Nursery, Nambour. This was successfully achieved with the production of 700 ferns.
- **Stage two:** maintenance of stock and reintroduction back into its natural habitat. The drought presented challenges together with the impact of hungry rock wallabies and scrub turkeys. Covering the fern with chicken wire prevented animal foraging. Higher rainfall in 2010 and 2011 resulted in increase in natural germination on the rock face.
- **Stage three** is maintenance of stock, ongoing monitoring and documentation for future records and guidelines. Photographic monitoring is carried out on a six monthly interval.

