

MONTEBELLO RENEWAL - A WESTERN SHIELD PROJECT

OUTLINE

"Montebello Renewal" is a project designed to rid the Montebello Islands Conservation Park of feral animals and re-introduce locally extinct species. The project is being organised by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) through its WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit and Pilbara Region office.

Montebello Renewal is planned in three phases.

Phase 1 will involve rat eradication. Phase 2 will be the eradication of feral cats and Phase 3 will be the re-introduction of locally extinct mammals and birds. All four known locally-extinct species occur on Barrow Island.

Trimouille Island may also be used for the introduction of species that are highly threatened on mainland Australia, eg, the Tanami Desert subspecies of the Mala *Lagorchestes hirsutus*. Phases 1 and 2 will run concurrently.

Phase 1 is very labour-intensive. Rat eradication will be achieved with anti-coagulants. Bait stations will be laid in a 50 m or smaller grid over every island, re-baited over the following six to seven days and then left for several months before being cleaned up. Black Rats occur on almost every one of the 100 or so islands in the Montebellos. They swim readily between islands, so eradication must take place on all islands in the one operation; otherwise re-invasion will occur. A 50 m grid over all the islands in the Montebellos adds up to between 12 000 and 14 000 bait stations.

Phase 1 is programmed to last 12 weeks from early June to late August 1996. During most of this time there will be eight people housed at Hermite Island - two CALM staff, five volunteers and a helicopter pilot or boat operator. All people will work two week shifts, so there will be a crew change of four people every week. Most crew will travel from Perth to Barrow Island courtesy of WAPET. Transport between Barrow and Hermite will be by helicopter or boat. Some staff and volunteers will be joining the project ex Karratha.

A helicopter has been chartered for weeks 2 to 5 inclusive, when the outer islands will be grided and equipment dumps installed. CALM's catamaran *Pseudorca II* will be used from weeks 6 to 11 inclusive to grid the inner islands and carry out crew changes and fresh food deliveries from Varanus.

Phase II will commence towards the end of Phase I and will be carried out by CALM staff trained and licensed in the use of 1080. Follow up Feral Cat eradication will occur as necessary after Phase I is complete.

Phase III will not commence until the islands are shown to be rat and cat free and poison baits have been cleaned up. It is hoped that Phase III can commence in the latter half of 1997.

There will be considerable media publicity about "Montebello Renewal" and CALM will be issuing newsletters and media statements from time to time. As well, a major article will be published in CALM's award winning magazine *Landscape*. Sponsorship will be clearly acknowledged in these information releases.