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PROJECT EDEN

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

February 1997

Project Eden, a bold initiative to make Peron Peninsula a rare haven for endangered native animals, is now approaching its third year of operation.

The first two years of the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) project has been very successful in controlling the threat of introduced predators, the fox and feral cat, from the 1050-square-kilometre peninsula.

1997 is a critical year for the project as it moves into its second phase, the reintroduction of native animals. If this is as successful as the first phase (the removal of introduced predators) Peron Peninsula will become the largest area in Australia in which large numbers of threatened arid zone native animals roam freely.

Success of Phase One — the removal of ferals

The removal of introduced predators, the fox and cat, from the peninsula is paramount to the success of Project Eden. To achieve this, aerial baiting was used for the first time on Peron. Dried meat baits containing the poison '1080', a naturally occurring poison found in native south-west plants of the genus *Gastrolobium*, were used. Although the poison is lethal to introduced species, native animals have evolved with the plants and have an extremely high tolerance to the poison.



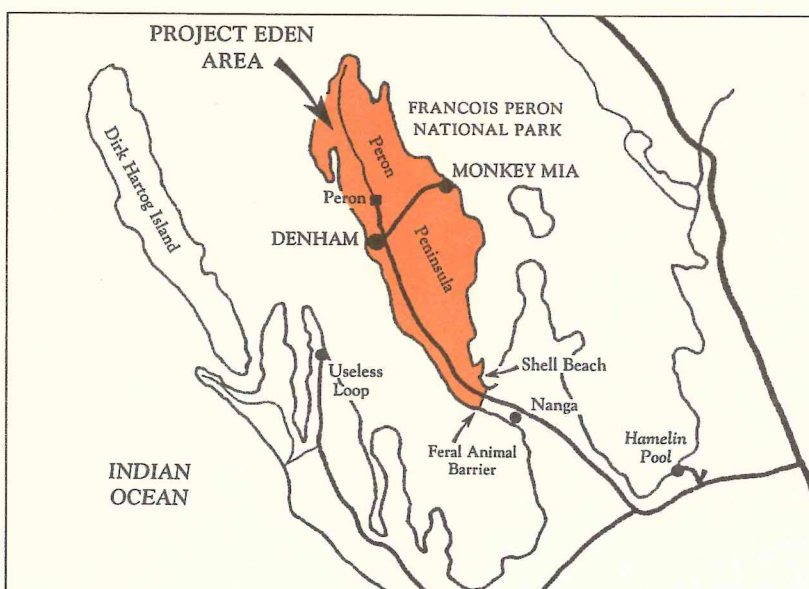
"Poison Peas": *Gastrolobium* genus that contains 1080 poison.

Photo - Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

Initial aerial baiting for foxes began in 1995. Fox numbers were reduced by 98 per cent, from approximately 2,500 foxes to less than an estimated 50. This caused an increase in cat numbers as foxes are believed to control cat numbers by competition and predation of young cats.

Broad scale aerial baiting specifically for cats in Autumn 1996 reduced numbers by 80 per cent and also resulted in a further reduction in fox numbers. For the first time in more than fifty years the peninsula is almost totally free of foxes. This result was beyond all expectations, particularly this early in the Project.

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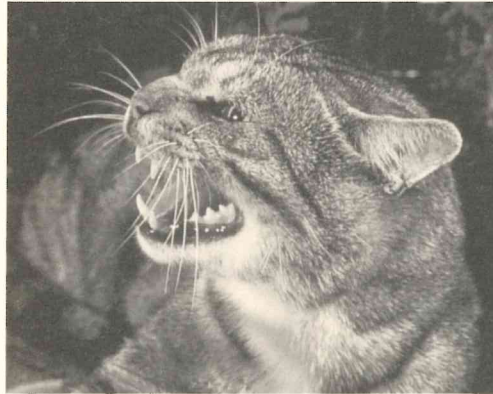
Success of Phase One(cont.)

Cat numbers were reduced to around 50 by special trapping techniques including the use of 'chirpers', battery activated cat sounds, to attract cats. However, fox control and breeding by the remaining cats have resulted in the feral cat population increasing to approximately 250 animals. Control of these is continuing with good results and the goal of under two cats per hundred-square kilometres will most likely be achieved by winter 1997 to allow the first of the reintroductions to proceed.

Rabbits have also been kept in control by myxomatosis,

although numbers are still high due to a very good season on the peninsula. Rabbit Calicivirus Disease (RCD) was released late last year and results are yet to be seen. The reduction of goats is also continuing by radio-tracking 'Judas goats' to locate herds. Goat control techniques have resulted in numbers being reduced to about 200 goats.

The 3.4km electric predator-proof fence across the isthmus of the peninsula, with its electronic cat and fox deterrents, continues to guard the highway entrance in keeping feral predators from reinvading.



Feral cat: the goal is to have under two cats per 100sq kilometres.

Photo - Ray Smith/CALM

Recovery

In its two years Project Eden has gone from strength to strength. Already one can see the results that stem from the removal of ferals. Native vegetation is blossoming and fauna is becoming more abundant.

Monitoring wildlife through the use of capture/release techniques using pit-traps and Elliot traps shows an increase in the number of small mammals such as the spinifex hopping mouse and several reptile species.

Animal tracks along the peninsula's many sandy roads reveal the growing diversity and numbers of larger animals that have started to thrive, including the echidna, euro, emu and goanna, which is especially increasing in numbers.

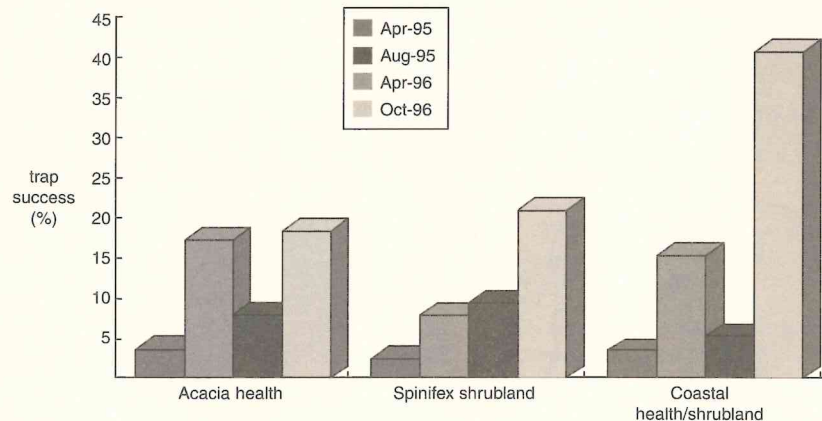
Continued monitoring of these species will establish whether this increase is due to seasonal influences or as a direct result of the control of introduced predators and herbivores.



Echidnas have increased in numbers.

Photo - Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

Small mammal trap success at Francois Peron National Park



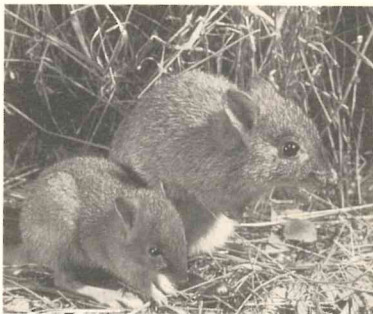
Trap results indicating the growing number of small mammals on Peron.

Reintroductions

Now that Peron is almost free of introduced predators, with fox and cat control within sight, the focus of *Project Eden* is shifting to the reintroduction of native animals.

The malleefowl and the woylie will be the first two species to be reintroduced to the peninsula. The first release of both these species is due to occur in winter 1997.

Woylies, otherwise known as brush-tailed bettongs, are now thriving in certain areas of the south-west as a result of scientific research, fox control and conservation management by



Woylie: will be reintroduced to Peron in winter 1997.

Photo - Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

CALM. The species status change from 'endangered' to 'conservation dependent' on the 1996 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals, makes it an ideal candidate for reintroduction. Woylies will be captured from areas in the south-west and translocated to the peninsula for release.

The malleefowl, as with many other native species such as the bilby and the rufous hare-wallaby, will be bred in captivity before being reintroduced, as numbers are very low in the wild.

A breeding station for these species has been established by CALM on Peron Peninsula. Building suitable breeding pens, capturing animals and tending to them is in itself a significant conservation project.

Malleefowl breeding has already started with eggs being collected from the wild and nurtured. These eggs have had a good hatching rate and it is anticipated that most of the chicks will survive infancy. They will be

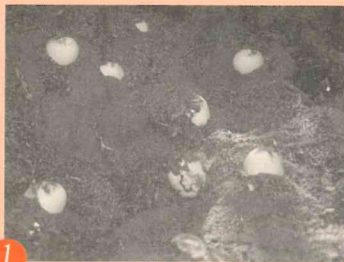


BetBet & Yindi: pair of breeding bilbies for Peron at Kanyana Native Fauna Rehabilitation Centre.

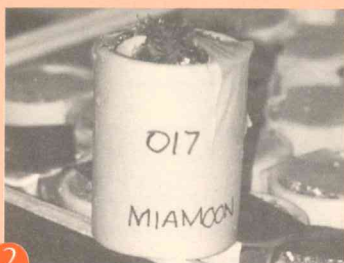
Photo - Mitzi Vance/CALM

cared for until half-grown and strong enough to survive independently in the wild.

Further translocation proposals and breeding programs for other native species are currently being prepared for *Project Eden*. All releases undertaken at Peron Peninsula will be the subject of comprehensive monitoring programs by CALM staff. Radio tracking equipment, including newly purchased radio towers and handheld aerials, will be used along with backup aircraft, if needed, for at least the first few months of release.



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Malleefowl Breeding Program

1. Malleefowl eggs captured from the wild for breeding.
2. The eggs were transported and kept in 'stubbie holders' during incubation for protection and insulation. The head of a chick can be seen.
3. A malleefowl chick emerging from its shell and protective insulator.
4. A malleefowl chick on the day it emerged.

Photos - Colleen Simms/CALM



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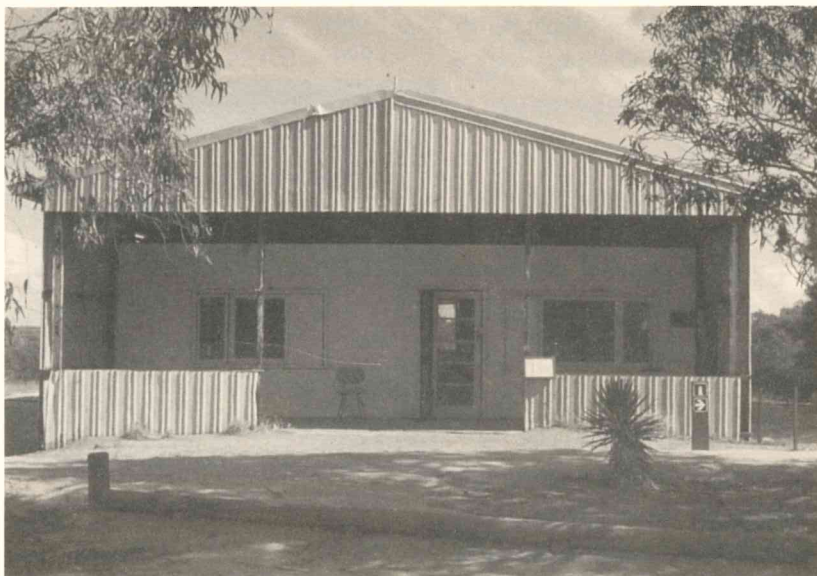
Project Eden — third phase nature-based tourism

The third phase of *Project Eden* is already under way. It involves the development of nature-based tourism opportunities and will focus on integrating the conservation efforts being undertaken on the peninsula with tourism.

It will involve the renovation of the Peron homestead precinct into an interpretative and tourist facility. Here, visitors will be able to experience first-hand the process that was undertaken to restore the natural beauty of the peninsula and its native wildlife.

It is planned to restore the homestead, built in the 1950s, into an accommodation facility for school groups and turn the old overseers quarters into an interpretative centre for Francios National Park.

All renovations planned will retain the original heritage and pastoral character. Additions to the precinct will be designed to compliment the established character.



The old overseers quarters will be turned into an interpretative centre.
Photo - Penny Walsh/CALM

World Heritage funding is being sought for the production of interpretative exhibits. Private sector corporate sponsorships are also being sought as are Government grants to turn these plans for the homestead into a reality, making it a world-class conservation estate.

CALM have already allocated \$25,000 to rebuild the overseers quarters. Structural renovations

will include recladding the shed, upgrading slab, replacing walls and incorporating wheelchair access throughout the building.

As Peron precinct is transformed into a major nature-based tourism attraction for Shark Bay, visitors will be able to learn about the project and its different phases, observe native animals in the wild, discover the heritage and history of the area and enjoy the nature-based tourism recreational activities associated with a world heritage listed area.

Soon Shark Bay may be known not only for the dolphins at Monkey Mia but also Peron Peninsula, a rare haven for native animals.



Part of Peron precinct currently used as camping site.
Photo - Penny Walsh/CALM

Produced by CALM Corporate Relations
Department of Conservation
and Land Management

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