



Conservation News

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MARCH 2003

Pilbara biological survey begins

by Sue McKenna

A FIVE-YEAR biological survey – one of the most extensive undertaken in Western Australia – has begun in the Pilbara.

Co-ordinated by the Department, the five-year Pilbara Biological Survey is expected to lead to the discovery of new species of plants and animals, and gather knowledge of the region's biodiversity, much of which is still poorly documented.

This knowledge will provide a basis for sustainable land use and conservation planning in the Pilbara.

About 20 staff from the Department and the Western Australian Museum will be involved.

Senior Departmental staff, including the Director of Science, Dr Neil Burrows, have already begun to speak to landholders and Aboriginal groups about the survey and access to their land by researchers.

Scientists and technical staff are now choosing 800 sites to document the region's flora and fauna. Species to be surveyed include birds, mammals (including bats), reptiles, frogs, spiders, stygofauna (small crustaceans that live under water), scorpions and associated arachnids as well as all vascular plants.

Environment and Heritage Minister Dr Judy Edwards said the sites would represent a cross section of the region's soils, landforms, climate and vegetation, with the diversity of plants and animals being recorded at each site.

"Karijini and Millstream-Chichester National Parks will be covered, as will pastoral leases, Aboriginal lands, conservation reserves and mining leases.

"The survey will comprise four years of on-the-ground research, followed by a year of analysis and documentation which will be collated into scientific publications," she said.

The area will cover 180,000 square kilometres bordered by the Indian Ocean, the Ashburton region to the south, and deserts to the east and north.

Dr Edwards said the Department was seeking financial sponsorship from mining companies and other organisations which will benefit from the survey information, as well as from the Commonwealth Government through the Natural Heritage Trust.

Information brochures have been sent to pastoralists and other land managers.

The first project is to survey stygofauna.

Dr Edwards said the Government's commitment to completing a program of regional surveys was part of its strategy for conserving the State's biodiversity.

Similar surveys have been completed in the southern Carnarvon Basin, eastern Goldfields, Nullarbor and Kimberley rainforests.



Marine rangers John Edwards (left) and Chris Mather with Crocodile Man Steve Irwin and cameraman on Carnac Island.
Photo by John Hunter.

Crikey! Commercial filming on our reserves

by John Hunter

CRIKEY! TV show hosts, movie stars, adventurers and mannequins continue to visit our parks and reserves to make documentaries, dramas and product advertisements.

As long as the 'Commercial Filming' permit requirements (found under the National Parks icon on our NatureBase website) have been followed and approved, it's all good communication about WA's special places and in some cases, a nice little earner for regions.

If you don't know much about the Filming Permit System, maybe now's a good time to check it out on the web.

Most people are unaware that the liaison with film groups usually starts months before the visit, with inquiries to the Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs Division regarding available locations, landscapes, species, habitat and wildlife permits.

So, when I got a call from Steve 'the-crocodile-hunter' Irwin's producer for a permit to visit Carnac Island, its deadly tiger snakes and dangerous sea lions, I thought: "It's time to see how the system works on the ground."

Marine rangers John Edwards, Chris Mather and myself, on board patrol boat Gandara, headed for an early morning rendezvous with the charter boat 'True North' at Carnac Island a few kilometres south-west of Fremantle. Two hours later Steve and crew arrived.

Trudging over the island in 35 degree heat, and trying to keep up with Irwin as he scuttled into every nook and cranny took some doing. The rangers had their work cut out to not only look after the film crew, but also umpire the sea lions vs other people on the beach, deter unauthorised tour boats and snorkelers, and maintain the welfare of all island flora and fauna at the same time. I have to hand it to those two blokes; it was a day of solid activity performed with absolute dedication and professionalism.

While a 'never-say-die' Steve, with Chris Mather in tow, continued to beat about Carnac unsuccessfully, John and I took Terry, Steve's wife - an adept wildlife handler herself - to nearby Garden Island. With the help of Ranger Luke Bouwman, a set was staged to produce some great footage using a tiger snake and a large carpet python that had been detained for trespassing on the navel base. No tiger snakes were found that day on Carnac Island however.

"Crikey!!" Steve said later, "if CALM knew I was coming, you'd have thought they'd have baked a snake."



Ranger in Charge at Yanchep National Park, John Wheeler (centre) holds one of the park's koalas at a ceremony to mark the departure of four koalas to Japan. He is with the Member for Wanneroo, Diane Guise, and the Director of Hyogo Prefecture Cultural Centre in Perth, Masa Ogawa. Photo by Norm Bailey.

Yanchep koalas head to Japan

FOUR koalas from Yanchep National Park left on a flight to Japan with their keeper, John Wheeler (pictured) this month.

As the park's Ranger in Charge, John has been in charge of the koala breeding program for several years.

He has already been to the Eastern States and Tasmania to exchange koalas as part of the breeding program.

The koalas which left for Japan – three females and a male – are a gift arranged by Premier Geoff Gallop for our sister state, Hyogo Prefecture.

They were put on a flight after

completing a 45-day quarantine period during which they were separated from Yanchep's other koalas.

John is staying with the koalas for their first 10 days to help them settle into their new home at the Awaji Farm Park tourist facility on Awaji Island, which has an established koala colony and other Australian native animals.

Dr Gallop said the gift would be a popular one that would enhance the already strong economic and cultural bonds between Hyogo Prefecture and Western Australia.

The koalas will be in a first-

class indoor facility with controlled temperatures.

As the park's first Western Australian-bred koalas they will add important diversity to the colony's breeding program, as well as its research work.

"The State Government is delighted to present this gift on behalf of all West Australians, knowing that the Japanese people's great love of koalas will ensure it is a successful gesture of goodwill," Dr Gallop said.

Yanchep National Park's koala colony was established in 1938 and has always been popular with Japanese tourists.

Working Together

As staff are well aware, the Department administers and operates under two primary pieces of legislation – the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* and the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*.

It is the Wildlife Conservation Act that provides protection for flora and fauna throughout the State's lands and waters, across tenure.

It has been recognised for more than a decade that the Act is outdated and no longer provides an adequate legislative basis for the conservation of biodiversity (the variety of life forms: the different animals, plants and micro-organisms, their genes and the ecosystems of which they are a part).

The Government has committed to developing new biodiversity conservation legislation.

Just before Christmas 2002 the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Hon Dr Judy Edwards MLA, released the consultation paper *A Biodiversity Conservation Act for Western Australia*.

The consultation paper has generated a high level of interest in the community, industry and other agencies. Some 150 submissions have been received, and the views and ideas put forward are now receiving consideration.

Issues that will require detailed attention as we develop modern biodiversity conservation legislation include the scope and breadth of a new Act; its relationship to other laws; proactive measures such as conservation covenants and assistance to private conservation efforts; protection of threatened species and ecological communities; bioprospecting; use of biodiversity by indigenous people; and enforcement powers and penalties.

Work on the new Act will be a key strategic priority for the Department during 2003.

Keiran McNamara, Acting Executive Director



Profile: Chontarle Pitulej



CHONTARLE Pitulej (left) says developing important relationships between the Department and the Indigenous community is one of the most important aspects of her job.

The 22-year-old is an Indigenous Heritage Officer with the Department's Indigenous Heritage Unit.

It's a position she's held with great enthusiasm and passion for the past three years.

Prior to her appointment to the unit, Chontarle had spent two years at Yanchep National Park where she was involved in Aboriginal programs and visitor information.

One of the key aspects of her work is consultation with the Aboriginal community in developing Indigenous interpretation.

"Consultation is so important," she says.

"The Department has given me the opportunity to work with the Aboriginal community to do interpretive work and to be a role model for other government departments.

"I want people to understand the significant relationship we have with nature, as it is a part

by Tracy Peacock

of our unique culture and cannot be separated."

Her projects include the documentation of stories from members of the Aboriginal community and site visits.

Chontarle, who is the national female Indigenous representative on Interpretive Australia Association's executive committee, says she hopes to travel to see how the consultation and liaison process is conducted in other parts of Australia.

She says she is proud of being Aboriginal and also of the work her unit is doing.

"We all work together in the unit and we all support each other – it's a fantastic unit. The feeling in our office is so full of energy."

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Students learn about Nyoongar culture

by Rhianna Mooney

STUDENTS from Swan TAFE are learning about their Nyoongar heritage and hope to share it with others through tourism.

The students from Balga are undertaking a Certificate III in Tour Guiding and attended Naragebup Rockingham Regional Environment Centre for two days to learn about land and resource management, dreaming and bush tucker from Department Wildlife Officer, Trevor Walley.

The rest of the time the students are based in Yanchep National Park, where they learn about conservation and land management, and ecotourism.

Trevor ('Kwilyar' the frog) said the course was the product of a partnership between the Department and Swan TAFE to deliver the tourism qualification.

"It provides an opportunity for students to learn about the wisdom and knowledge of the traditional Nyoongar people," he says.

"It is so important we get more young people involved in learning about the traditional cultures so the stories, history and practices of the Nyoongar people continue to be shared."

Trevor spends three days each week at the Naragebup Rockingham Regional Environment Centre, where apart from tutoring the TAFE students, he delivers Aboriginal cultural presentations to other audiences.

Naragebup's Deputy Convenor, Ann Goodale said the Department's support of the centre was appreciated.

"The centre is visited by students of all ages, from pre-primary to university," she said.

"It is great to have Trevor here so the centre can offer our visitors information and education about the Nyoongar culture."



The Department's Trevor Walley (left) with Swan TAFE students (left to right) Rabina Clarke, Elizabeth Narrier and Fred Rivers making handprints as part of the Aboriginal Culture course. Photo by Rhianna Mooney.

Elusive cane toad disappears

By Tracy Peacock

A RECENT sighting of a cane toad in WA's Kimberley region looks likely to have been a one-off.

Kimberley Regional Manager Chris Done said despite intensive searching and trapping no further traces of the animals have been found.

"We're confident no population has been established in the search area," said Chris.

Cane toads were reportedly sighted at a Fitzroy Valley cattle station about 120 kms south-east of Derby by a contractor working in the area around Christmas time.

The contractor said two cane toads had been in the station workshop with one having been killed but the other escaping.

Chris said staff had made trips to the area

and conducted intensive searches in ponds and water holes and other likely places using scoop nets to look for adults, tadpoles and eggs.

He said it had been important to investigate the reported sighting because if it had been confirmed it would have represented a jump in distribution of nearly a thousand kilometres.

"We need to buy as much time as we can to allow scientists to have some chance of developing control methods," he said.

"Once the toads arrive in the Kimberley, the impact on wetland and surrounding ecosystems will be devastating."

Western Shield review begins

by Nigel Higgs

A REVIEW of the Department's wildlife recovery program Western Shield began last month when more than 100 people gathered in Perth to hear presentations from Department staff involved in the project.

The audience included representatives of interstate and Federal conservation agencies as well as members of local conservation groups and the Conservation Commission of WA.

Acting Executive Director Keiran McNamara said the presentations covered a range of issues including

translocation and fauna reconstruction sites, captive breeding, feral cat control, community support and education, monitoring, staff training and financial analysis.

In his opening remarks, Keiran said Western Shield had produced some spectacular results.

"We've had three native mammals – the woylie, tammar wallaby and quenda (southern brown bandicoot) – taken off the threatened species list and re-established populations

of several species into their former ranges," he said.

An independent panel comprising of Professor Hugh Possingham, from the Departments of Zoology and Mathematics at Queensland University; Professor Peter Jarman, from the Department of Ecosystem Management at the University of New England, NSW; and Mr Allen Kearns, from the CSIRO's Sustainable Ecosystems Division is reviewing Western Shield.

Panel members later visited Dryandra Woodland between Wandering and Narrogin and Peron

Peninsula in the World Heritage-listed Shark Bay area where the Department is introducing species that were once widespread but have become locally extinct.

During the forum, the audience was able to ask questions of staff who presented papers. One theme was the scope for community involvement in Western Shield.

Community representatives Suzanne Dennings from the Malleefowl Preservation Group and June Butcher from Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre were

keen that local communities became involved in fox baiting.

The Department's Director of Science, Dr Neil Burrows, said 52 post-graduate students worked with the Science Division, many of them in Western Shield-related programs.

Keiran paid tribute to Peter Mawson, Tony Start, Joanne Smith, Christine Freegard and Peter Orell who had put in a great deal of time and effort into organising the forum and workshop and overseeing the preparation of the papers for the review.



Snakes alive!

by David Brewtnall

ACTING Executive Director Keiran McNamara tackled an unplanned "risk management project" when he visited Woodvale Research Centre in late February.

In the event, the docility of a three-metre olive python – a resident of the Centre's reptile house – meant minimal risk to personal safety was involved in Keiran's close animal encounter.

Keiran and other members of the Corporate Executive team visited the reptile house during a short tour of the research centre, after holding their formal Corporate Executive meeting in the main offices.

The Executive holds some of its regular meetings outside Crawley headquarters so that directors can have a greater understanding of operational matters, as well as giving staff an opportunity to raise issues in a more informal way. Other meetings have been held at Kensington, in Albany and at the Herbarium, and a visit to the MidWest is planned soon.

Senior Technical Officer Andy Williams – pictured holding the python – told his visitors that individual snakes, like humans, have different temperaments and personalities. He agreed with the writer that selection of the placid Pilbara olive python was a sound career-preservation move.

Three years without injury

IN sporting circles it's known as a "three-peat" – winning an award in three successive years.

For the Department's Woodvale research team and Swan Coastal District, the achievement is three consecutive years of being free of lost-time injury.

Acknowledging this outstanding performance, Acting Executive Director Keiran McNamara said it reflected "a strong safety culture in which individuals accept responsibility, not only for their own wellbeing but for their workmates, too."

by David Brewtnall

For the District, the achievement represented a huge turnaround from the mid-1990s, when injuries resulted in up to 70 lost days a year.

Mr McNamara congratulated the safety committee currently led by Myles Mulvey, which he said had built on strong District culture and management support for safety in the workplace. The outstanding achievement was celebrated by staff

on 6 February when Environment and Heritage Minister, Judy Edwards, presented the award certificate.

In the case of the Woodvale team, safety diligence and vigilance was maintained while staff again travelled extensively.

Research staff are trained in skills needed to work in remote areas including advanced 4WD, firearms, senior first aid, basic fire awareness programs, chemical handling, chainsaw safety and specific safety issues.



From left to right: Grant Pearson, Richard McAlinden, Keiran McNamara, Bill Muir, Margaret Langley, Mike Scanlon, Andy Williams, Joanne Smith and Brad Durrant. Photo by David Brewtnall.

Free skin cancer tests

by Linda Gilbert

TWO Perth companies which provide computerised mole scanning – MoleScan and SkinScan – have agreed to bulk bill their services to Department employees who have moles, freckles or spots of concern that they would like checked out.

During the examination employees will have the opportunity to request a complete skin scan.

Computerised technology magnifies your skin up to 30 times, allowing clearer analysis of spots and enabling images to be retained for future comparison.

Vouchers for this service are available from the Risk

Management Section.

Bookings to the companies can be made by contacting:

- Mole Scan Como 9474 4955
- Mole Scan Ingelwood 9272 9255
- Mole Scan Kingsway 9408 044
- Skin Scan Applecross 9364 6633
- Skin Scan West Perth 9485 0700

Skin cancer check saves life

MY experience with skin cancer started one night while shaving, where I noticed something on the side of my nose that didn't look like the normal type of blemish people occasionally get there.

The following day while talking to a workmate Keith Tresidder, I mentioned my concern regarding this mark on my nose. Keith strongly suggested I go and have it checked out by MoleScan, a doctor's surgery specialising in moles and skin cancers without delay.

I trusted Keith's judgement and I immediately made my appointment to see the doctor.

At MoleScan, the doctor took one look at my nose and said: "nothing to worry about, but while you're here, off with the shirt and let's have a look at the rest of you."

I must say the doctors are very thorough, they look everywhere from between your toes to parting the hair on your head to inspect your scalp.

My inspection was going great guns until the doctor got to the middle of my back where she found something that looked slightly unusual, but couldn't tell because it was so small, even under the magnification of their specialised equipment.

A small biopsy was carried out, and a sample sent off to pathology for analysis. On reflection I did tell the doctor that for some time now I have been asking my partner Sue, to have a look and see what

by Steve Strachan

was in this area that was making my back itch, like a mosquito bite. Sue never could find a mossier bite.

One week later I returned to MoleScan for my biopsy results. The news was not good: malignant melanoma. I sat down with a thud, looked at the doctor and said: "OK Doc. What now?" She said: "It has to be cut out, surgically removed."

"OK," I said, "I have full medical cover book me into the best private hospital. I want the best of everything."

"Mr Strachan," the doctor said, "you do not walk out of here today with that melanoma still in you. You cannot afford to go on a surgical waiting list for one day let alone one week or a fortnight."

This really sent home to me the seriousness of the matter. It really does knock the stuffing out of you, so, when the doctor said: "We have to remove a fairly large piece of flesh," I said "Take what you like just leave my neck and something for me to sit on."

I am now under the watchful eye of my skin specialist for the next five years, and just for the hell of it I also go to MoleScan regularly.

In conclusion, I would like to say to Keith and MoleScan my sincere thanks and gratitude forever, I truly believe you have saved my life.



A friend in need is a friend indeed...When Ranger in Charge at John Forrest National Park, Keith Tresidder (left) advised Walyunga National Park's Ranger in Charge Steve Strachan to have a mole checked, it was advice that probably saved his life.

Right on track

Right on Track is a monthly news story sponsored by the corporate executive group using stories from around the State that demonstrate our strategic directions and core values. This month's feature, by senior project officer, Tammie Reid, is about a new interagency booklet titled Facilitation Toolkit.

A booklet focused on assisting Departmental staff work more effectively with groups is hot off the press.

A cooperative project with Department of Environmental Protection, Water and Rivers Commission and this Department, it has been produced expressly for staff who are often called upon to work with groups, yet may not be trained in facilitation and group processes.

"As an agency, we share similar challenges and situations with other environmentally focused departments when working with the community for conservation outcomes. We are often talking to the same stakeholders at the same time," explains Tammie.

"A need for effective group processes was expressed via the extension officers network within Water and Rivers Commission and echoed by our Department's staff during the public participation training programs.

"It made sense that we jointly developed a resource for staff."

The Facilitation Toolkit contains checklists, guidelines, processes and tips for adding value to the overall process. There is also a current list of resources and references.

There are also insights and tips from agency people who are often called upon to facilitate groups. John Skillen, Kevin Vear, Tammie Reid, Nicci Tsernjavski and Gary McMahon are featured in these breakout segments.

Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs Director Ron Kawalilak acknowledges the importance of producing support material for staff in this area.

"Maintaining community involvement and support is one of our Departmental key strategic directions," he says.

"As we seek to improve the ways we do this, many of our people are working in a more consultative and collaborative manner with the community with the objective of getting more effective conservation outcomes on the ground."

Feedback from early public participation training workshops identified a need to support and develop such staff in working with groups, managing conflict and controversy, valuing difference and managing stakeholder expectations.

Regional training workshops that will incorporate the facilitation toolkit are scheduled for May/June and the booklet is soon to be available on CALMweb.

"I look forward to feedback on this booklet and on ways the Department can continue to develop and support staff in this important area for our work," Ron says.

Further enquiries can be directed to Tammie Reid at our Bunbury office.

Conservation briefs

Convictions for coral damage and illegal moorings

Two Coral Bay men who appeared in the Exmouth District Court were fined for offences under the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984.

One man was fined \$1200 after his charter vessel struck the reef in Ningaloo Marine Park's Maud Sanctuary Zone, causing significant damage to live plate and staghorn corals.

Another man was fined \$2000 and \$2000 costs after pleading guilty to three charges relating to the illegal installation of a mooring – against the instructions of the Department – for his private boat in Bills Bay, in the Maud Sanctuary Zone.

The man was charged with taking coral in a marine park, occupying land in a marine park without authority and installing a mooring without authority and contrary to regulations.

Public comment on park boundaries

Indicative boundaries have been released for five proposed parks.

Four are to the west and south of Nannup (Butler, Hilliger, Milyeannup and Blackwood River) and one (Boydaminup National Park) is to the west of Lake Muir.

People have until April 30 to comment.

New 'atlas' maps tuart ecosystems

A new 'atlas' has been prepared to more accurately reflect the distribution of tuart ecosystems along the Swan Coastal Plain.

It shows that there are around 29,500 hectares of tuart woodlands compared with the 38,829 hectares that were previously mapped in 1979.

The new atlas is a more accurate assessment. The latest 1 to 10,000 fine scale mapping used high resolution aerial photography.

Marine conservation reserve in South-West

Community consultation is being sought on the establishment of a marine conservation reserve in the Geographe Bay-Capes-Hardy Inlet area.

The Marine Parks and Reserves Authority has identified the waters as a priority in recognition of the area's high values.

Expressions of interest are being sought for an advisory committee. The closing date is April 24.

For more information go to www.naturebase.net/capes_marine.html

Facelift for conservation areas at Nannup

by Darren Stevens

THE St John Brook precinct, a nine kilometre drive from Nannup, boasts stunning vistas ranging from pristine pools and associated fringing vegetation to 100-year-old rail bridges.

The area has recently been reinstated as a proposed conservation park and with the help of new parks funding its main attraction, Barrabup Pool, has had a facelift.

Work has included the construction of a picnic shelter and new toilet block.

Currently underway is an upgrade of the Barrabup Pool day use area and car park and the extension of the Old Timberline Trail that follows sections of the path taken by steam driven locomotives in the early 1900's.

The main attraction of the Barrabup Pool upgrade is a trestle bridge that forms part of the Old Timberline Trail.

It has been designed to replicate bridges that were used when the area was a thriving mill town 100 years ago, remnants of which can still be seen within the park.

A project such as this had not been done before in this district and required much planning, thought and time from all involved.

The bridge is currently having decking and handrails fitted.



Left to right: Bill Stailard, Geoff Wilson, Darren Stevens, George Laws and Doug Hovell in the St John Brook precinct. Photo by Ken Woodenberg.



Award for Roadside Committee

THIS year's Wagin Woolorama proved to be very successful for the Roadside Conservation Committee, which won best outside display.

Visitors sought advice or clarification on a range of topics.

The display featured a high conservation value roadside with taxidermy specimens of native fauna, and a low conservation value roadside with their attendant 'nasties' – a fox and a feral cat.

"Visitors were able to see the many values and financial incentives for retaining vegetation on roadsides and left with the message: 'What sort of roadside do you want?'" said David Lamont, Executive Officer of the Roadside Conservation

by David Lamont

Committee based with the Department at Kensington.

The Woolorama display was an initiation for the Committee's new technical officers, Kate Jackson and David Mickle, who were employed to assist with the implementation of pending changes to the Environmental Protection Act, which are before Parliament.

Pictured left to right, at the Wagin Woolorama were David Mickle, David Lamont and Kate Jackson.

CALM Bush Rangers reach another milestone

THE CALM Bush Ranger program has reached another milestone.

It was recognised for excellence in the recent Vocational Education and Training in Schools awards presented by Education and Training Minister Alan Carpenter.

The Department and Rossmoyne Senior High School's CALM Bush Rangers Unit received the

award because the Rossmoyne cadets were the first school group to complete accredited vocational training through their voluntary activities.

CALM Bush Ranger Program's Bronwyn Hymphreys said the Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management course had been trialed at Rossmoyne last year.

Bronwyn said the program's continued success could be attributed to the important partnerships which had developed over several years with community groups, schools and government.

This also included important relationships within the Department with more than 85 staff involved in the program over the past year, she said.

Staff changes . . . Staff changes . . . Staff changes . . . Staff changes . . .

Contracts

Kirsten Pearce, technical officer, Science Division, Manjimup; Marika Maxwell, nature conservation officer, Blackwood District, Kirup; Gordon Herbert, cartographer, GIS, Information Management Branch, Kensington; Penelope Fewson, technical officer, Science Division, WA Herbarium; Laura Sinclair, technical officer, Science Division, Kensington; Tran Thuy, project officer, Corporate Information, Kensington; Jodie Wood, resource assistant, Forest Management Branch, Bunbury Regional HQ; Tom Hamilton, research scientist, Science Division; Gillian Stack,

project officer, Merredin District Office; Kristy Vella, field officer, Parks and Visitor Services; Marie Strelein, field officer, Mid-West region, Geraldton; Glen Daniel, field officer, Fire Management Services, Kalgoorlie; Vanessa Beal, officer, Parks and Visitor Services, Kensington; Ian Anderson, reserves officer, Monkey Mia, Shark Bay.

Permanent appointments

Kate Roy-Chowdhury, field officer, Wheatbelt Region, Narrogin; Brenton Clinch, Aboriginal heritage officer, Regional Services Division, Yanchep National Park, Swan Coastal District; Ray de Jong,

business manager, Pilbara Region, Karratha; Fiona Boulton, assistant conservation officer, Regional Services Division, Perth Hills, Mundaring; Lorna Charlton, visitor interpretation officer, Parks and Visitor Services, Kensington.

Promotions

Brad Colton, HR systems administrator, Corporate Services, People Services Branch; Steve Slavin, regional leader, Parks and Visitor Services, Swan Region, Kensington; Stephen White, regional leader, Karratha Regional HQ, Regional Services Division; Alanna Chant, flora conservation officer, Geraldton.

Contract ceased

Kelley Chapman, world heritage community education officer, Shark Bay District, Denham, Mid-West Region; Katherine Zdunic, project officer, Information Management Branch, Kensington

Temporary transfers

Robert Round-Turner, district fire coordinator, from Dwellingup to Kirup District Office; Craig Letica, from Finance Branch Kensington to Perth Hills, Mundaring.

Transfer

Lee Butcher, field officer, Kununurra.

Resignation

Joanne Lipinski, officer, Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs, Crawley.

Buffers prevent bigger fires

by Nigel Higgs

THE Department faced the biggest forest fire in 35 years when a bushfire burned through 35,000 hectares in the proposed Walpole Wilderness Area earlier this month.

The fire started in extremely severe weather conditions on March 9 when an earlier fire in the Northumberland block flared, throwing embers into the Surprise block to the south. Over the next few days, winds shifted 'around the clock', both figuratively and literally. By the Thursday, the fire had done a complete '360' and ran back into the burned area of Northumberland.

Frankland District Manager Peter Bidwell said it was the biggest forest fire since the 1967 Boorara fires. It also was the second big forest fire in the south-west this year.

In January, 18,000 hectares of jarrah and wandoo forest in the Mt Cooke area, 75 km south-east of Perth, was burned after lightning strikes ignited a series of fires.

Peter said the Walpole fire was a particular challenge, especially as suppression took into account environmental factors and wilderness values.

"It was in high conservation value area designated to become a wilderness area. Consequently, the suppression actions had to protect these values as well as having a minimal impact on the environment and ensuring the safety of fire crews," he said.

"The fire also was burning through areas that contained relatively heavy fuels. One area was a no-planned burn reference site that had not been burnt for 28 years. There also were a lot of dry leaves and twigs suspended in the understorey shrubs.

"Fire crew in the field described the fire as 'roaring like a freight train' at times as flames soared 40 metres and spot fires occurred up to 3 km ahead of the main fire front.

"Low fuel buffers that had been created either in previous wildfires or through planned burns assisted greatly in preventing the fire continuing to run to the south and east under north-west winds earlier in the week."