

CONCOM workshop focuses on islands

By ANDREW BURBIDGE

WITHOUT offshore islands, 10 species of mammal which formerly occurred on the Australian mainland and six species of birds from the north and south islands of New Zealand would have become extinct, a technical workshop held on Barrow Island concluded recently.

The meeting, convened by the Council of Nature Conservation Ministers, brought together 17 experts from Australia and New Zealand to discuss issues related to the management of the more than 3,000 islands in their regions.

Our islands are crucial to worldwide nature conservation because they are major breeding grounds for seals, seabirds and turtles.

Islands also have recreational, educational and scientific values and protect remnant populations of species and undisturbed habitat.

However, some islands have been seriously degraded through the introduction of exotic animals or inappropriate developments.

Examples of degraded islands discussed included: Rottnest Island WA, where in the past the lack of any management plans for the natural environment of the island has resulted in physical damage to the point where major rehabilitation programs need to be undertaken; the Ashmore Reef Islands in the Timor Sea where Indonesian

fishermen are depleting seabird and turtle rookeries; the continuing misuse of Fraser Island in the Moreton Bay Islands in Queensland in the absence of management planning procedures involving public consultation; and several New Zealand islands where the introduction of rats, cats, stoats and predatory birds have led to the extinction of several endemic species.

The workshop discussed techniques for enhancing the conservation values of islands.

These include the preparation of management plans with full public participation, the eradication of problem animals, translocation and re-establishment of endangered species and preparation of educational material to increase the understanding of the role of islands in conservation.

Case studies from around the region were discussed.

Good examples are the saving of the Chatham Island (NZ) Black Robin which had dropped to five individuals, the successful eradication of feral goats

on Bernier Island, WA, which is the home of several endangered mammals, and the development of a management plan for Rottnest Island.

Western Australian petroleum's conservation consultant, Harry Butler, used Barrow Island as an example to demonstrate that certain uses of islands need not have a deleterious effect if properly managed.

Barrow Island is one of the most important Australian islands for the conservation of endangered mammals and has supported a commercial oil field since 1964, but the management techniques followed by Wapet have prevented the introduction of exotic plants and animals and its full suite of mammals remains intact.

The workshop concluded that islands are of critical significance to nature conservation but are facing increasing threats.

Failure to recognise the problems deriving from these threats and failure to deal with them effectively, could result in further serious degradation of islands and extinction of many Australasian species.

Dan and Dave (locally known as Dad and Dave) will be working on disturbance ecology in the Central Desert Nature Reserves.

District Wildlife Officer Bob Fitzgerald, who transferred to replace Peter Collins, has settled in well.

Bob's wife Ellen presented him with a son, Edward John Ross, on September 27 — only six weeks after arriving. Congratulations, Bob and Ellen. — IAN KEALLEY

Marine Park a first

WA's first marine park will be established from Trigg Island to Burns Beach.

It will cover about 10,500ha of coastal waters, and become a multi-purpose area for recreation, conservation, education and scientific research.

The initial step to establish the Park follows an extensive scientific study of the area and the publication of a draft management plan.

CALM will take overall responsibility for the management of the park, and local authorities will continue to manage foreshore areas within their jurisdiction.

Marine Park Rangers will advise the public and educate them about conservation priorities.

An education resource centre will be a focal point of the Park.

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Caporn has been appointed Assistant Foreman and will trans-

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fer to Kalgoorlie in the New Year.

Before joining CALM, David worked for the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory as a ranger at Cobourg Peninsula and Kakadu National Park.

Technical Officer (Aboriginal Liaison) Dan Grace started work at Kalgoorlie in mid-October, after a long move with his wife Bev and four children from Bathurst in NSW.