

# SEARCH FOR ROCK WALLABIES

By Jack Kinnear

**A desert expedition in October by Wildlife Research staff to the remote Calvert Ranges located a natural population of Rock Wallabies.**

Finding the Rock Wallabies is important for two reasons: increasing our knowledge of the species and gaining information that will help us conserve wildlife in the settled areas of WA.

The expedition party consisted of Mike Onus, Phil Fuller and myself, from the Wildlife Research Centre, and Ivor Llewellyn, former Chief photogrammetrist (now retired) with the Department of Lands and Surveys.

The Calvert Ranges lie about 400 km north of Wiluna, deep in sand ridge country.

The sand ridges are of the chain or jumbled type and while the ridges are not the highest in the desert, the density of the ridges must be the highest.

This meant we had to plan our route very carefully to minimise dune crossings as much as possible. Phil and Ivor spent many hours over aerial photographs plotting a route through the maze of ridges.

Two vehicles were taken and fuel and water were budgeted to avoid excessive weight, but it was difficult to calculate our fuel consumption through unknown sand ridge country.

We carried enough fuel allowing for the worst possible scenario, assuring that at least one vehicle would be able to return to Wiluna.

From Wiluna, we travelled up the Canning Stock Route, encountering ridges that became increasingly difficult to cross, but a drop in tyre pressure was all that was needed.

North of Well 16, we left the stock route and turned east toward the Calverts, which were only 40 km away.

The first sand ridge was a beauty and seemed destined to stop us dead in our tracks. We wondered what lay ahead if and when we got over the summit.

With our most experienced driver, Phil Fuller, at the wheel, the dune was charged to no avail.

Two attempts later, the

land cruiser near the boiling point, we were still wondering what lay ahead.

We eventually conquered the ridge after experimenting with tyre pressure.

The final 40 km to the Calverts was a painfully slow process that took more than four hours over a very rough track.

At the end of the first hour, I was cursing the designers of 4WD seats and suspensions. After four hours I was ready to trade the vehicle for a second-hand camel.

On approaching the Calverts, we wondered about the outcome — would we merely find the usual rock kangaroos or would we find Rock Wallabies in sufficient numbers?

On site, it soon became evident that Rock Wallabies were about in large numbers. It was an especially cheerful camp that night.

Having located them, what can we learn about the species? And how will this information help us conserve wildlife in the settled areas of the State?

Firstly, one can learn some important things

about the niche the animals are in — that is the conditions under which these species can live.

From our brief visit, it was clear the animals were adapted to very harsh conditions and low-quality food.

These observations imply that we cannot explain away the disappearance of Rock Wallaby populations in the milder South West on grounds of adverse climate: the species is too well adapted to arid conditions for such reasoning to be valid.

When it comes to drought, Rock Wallabies are tough and resilient — nobody can accuse them of being wimps.

But perhaps most importantly, a study of remote desert Rock Wallabies in their undisturbed habitat will help us to understand how to keep populations of rare and endangered species on reserves in the Wheatbelt where the habitat for wildlife is now so fragmented.

We have to understand the ecological consequence and problems faced by wildlife living in these environments and we can learn the essentials from studying the Rock Wallaby in its natural state because that has been its lifestyle for thousands of years.

## LIBRARY SERVICES

The second CALM MAG (Library Accessions list) and guide to the Library and its services was distributed to those who requested to remain on the mailing list.

If you missed receiving your issue and wish to do so please inform us.

The Library celebrated its first birthday in December with a champagne afternoon tea and cake for those at the Research Centre.

The event was a success with a display on the history of the new library building on exhibition.

### COMING EVENTS

A computer listing of journals currently received

by the Library will be distributed shortly.

With the increase of Departmental staff it is inevitable that longer circulation times will be experienced.

Many journals are also lost while circulating.

It has therefore been decided by the Library Committee that contents pages of the popular journals will be photocopied and circulated.

Staff can then request articles to be copied and sent to them.

Through this system staff members will have access to a larger number of journals than previously received.

— ELIZABETH LACZO

## BRIEFLY

The inaugural State Operations Headquarters Volleyball Championship culminated in a powerhouse win to the Internal Audit side in the Final held December 5.

The pre-tournament favourites, Research, could not get their usual game going in the face of some vintage volleyball from the Audit Team, made up of Julie Anderson (non-playing captain), Mary Colreavy, Roger Gorski, Peter Ryan, Norm Press, Jeff Main, Bob McGeachin, and Rod Taylor.

Special thanks go the substitutes Shane Knapp, Les Marrable and Helen Fordham, who filled in when the need arose during the early rounds.

The final scores were: 15-3; 15-2 and 15-1.

The teams that competed in the volleyball competition this year were Research, Wildlife and Accounts (Group A); and Internal Audit, Mapping and Records (Group B).

Thanks to Colin Barns for organising this popular competition.

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An arts and crafts award and exhibition open to employees and their families is being sponsored by CALM.

Categories in which prizes may be awarded will include painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, woodwork, textiles and others, depending on interest shown.

Further details will be available in the next CALM News.

Any staff member with an interest in this area who would like to make a suggestion or contribution toward the planning and organisation of the event, is encouraged to contact Hilary Graham as soon as possible at Murdoch House on 364 9666 on Tuesdays, or at home on 386 2639.