DIBBLER POPULATION RARE FIND

By PHIL FULLER and ANDREW BURBIDGE

A JOINT CALM Wildlife Research, Planning and Wildlife Protection team had no idea they would find something as interesting as a Dibbler population while collecting information for a technical report and management plan on the islands between Lancelin and Dongara.

On October 31, while on the 25ha Boullanger Island, about 1km off Island Point at Jurien Bay, Phil Fuller saw tracks in sand which were larger than the small dunnarts and house mice known to be on the island.

The tracks were still visible shortly afterwards when he returned to the site with other staff but soon disappeared; they had only been visible because of overnight dewfall.

A month later we returned to Boullanger Island with 18 Elliott mammal traps (all that could be located at the Wildlife Research Centre at the time) and these were set on December 3.

The next morning Greg Keighery and Phil checked some of the traps while Sue Moore and Andrew Williams checked the rest.

The first two traps had captured house mice but the third had a larger animal in it.

It took them a few moments to realise that it was a Dibbler *(Parantechinus apicalis)* since no-one had expected anything so interesting.

On December 10 we returned to the island with Sue Moore, Andrew Williams, Geoff Hanley and Don Noble.

This time we had 158 Elliott traps, some sent down from the Karratha office and some lent by the W.A. Museum.

We also set five pit-fence traplines.

The next day most of the team had work to do on islands near Cervantes so Andrew Burbidge travelled to Boullanger Island on his own, courtesy of the Fisheries Department.

The catch for the day was an amazing 89 House Mice, five dunnarts *(Sminthopsis* sp. probably *griseoventer)* and 15 Dibblers.

Over the next two nights we caught a further 18 Dibblers, plus two recaptures.

Twelve of these were on Whitlock Island (5.4ha) which is joined to Boullanger by a sand bar at very low tides.

We also trapped on Favourite Island (3.0ha) and Escape Island (10.5ha) but did not catch anything there although small mammal tracks about the size of a mouse were seen on Escape Island.

The discovery of the Dibbler on Boullanger and Whitlock Islands is great news for its long-term conservation.

Historically many medium-sized mammals have declined on the Australian mainland and some species survive today only on islands.

If the Jurien Bay Islands are managed to prevent environmental problems like the introduction of cats or rats, the survival of the Dibbler seems assured.

This female Dibbler was the cause of much excitement when it was captured on Boullanger Island in Jurien Bay. The Dibbler's presence was unexpected, but welcome, news to CALM's wildlife researchers because its isolated island habitat improves its chances of conservation. Photograph by Babs and Bert Wells.

Millstream Check

The Millstream aquifer will continue to be the major water source for developing towns in the Roebourne Shire in the Pilbara, despite the construction of the Harding Dam.

The Millstream aquifer is also the lifeblood of a unique aquatic environment adjacent to the Fortescue River in the Millstream/Chichester National Park.

Any reduction in the aquifer level by pumping has a corresponding effect in the amount of water which seeps into the Park.

National Park Rangers measure any changes on a weekly basis within the Park boundaries. If a deterioration in spring flows or vegetative health is apparent, a request is made to W.A. Water Authority for an increase in supplementation pumping from specially made bores.