

Exciting discovery ...

HEATH RAT FOUND AT FITZGERALD

By *ANDREW BURBIDGE*

THE Heath Mouse or Heath Rat, presumed extinct in WA because it hadn't been seen here since 1931, has been rediscovered in the Ravensthorpe Range and the Fitzgerald River National Park.

During the ongoing fauna survey of FRNP, Ravensthorpe zoologist Andrew Chapman found some bones that had recently been disgorged by a Barn Owl.

He sent them to WA Museum expert Dr Alex Baynes, who identified some of them as belonging to the long-lost Heath Mouse.

On a later look through the Museum's collection of Southern Bush Rats, Dr Baynes noticed one that looked a little different from the rest.

On closer investigation, it turned out to be a Heath Mouse, collected by Andrew during a 1983 fauna survey of the Ravensthorpe Range.

A careful look at the rest of the Ravensthorpe collection revealed two more.

Heath Mice look much like young Bush Rats and their incorrect identification is understandable.

A few days after Dr Baynes' sleuthing, Tony Lynam, a post-graduate zoology student at UWA, and Andrew Chapman set out to FRNP to trap Dibblers for Tony's study.

Alerted by Dr Baynes' discovery, Tony took a close look at what he caught and soon found a Heath Mouse in one of the traps.

The next day Andrew caught another in a different trapline 1km away.

The Heath Mouse was first recorded in 1906 at Woyerling Wells, near Tutanning Nature Reserve east of Pingelly.

The only other known locality was near Buniche, east of Lake Grace.

In 1961, the species was discovered in south-western Victoria, where it is a rare species.

In 1976 the EPA recommended that the Ravensthorpe Range be declared a nature reserve following its consideration of the 1974 Report of the Conservation Through Reserves Committee.

Implementation has been delayed because of the large number of mining tenements in the area.

The rediscovery shows the importance of detailed biological surveys of areas to fully document their conservation value.

The rediscovery of the Heath Mouse in the FRNP emphasises the Park's very high conservation value, and the urgent need to develop management plans to protect and enhance its conservation and recreation values.

Editor's Note: Jim Williamson of Planning Branch reports that work on the draft management plan for FRNP will begin next month.

Tagged turtle in N.T.

THE first recovery of a turtle tagged by CALM officers has been recorded at Croker Island, in the Northern Territory.

The turtle, a female green, was caught by an Aborigine, who noticed the tag, recorded the details, and returned it to the ocean.

The turtle had been tagged on November 21 on Lacepede Island, north of Broome.

Research Scientist Bob Prince said the turtle travelled about 1500km to Croker Island.

"We had some Aboriginal people helping us tag these turtles, so it was interesting that it had been captured by an Aborigine too," Bob says.

Another interesting factor is that there have been two recorded captures of turtles tagged in Indonesia