

The secret life of Yanchep Park

DURING the July school holidays, children and parents from Wanneroo and surrounding areas sought out the secrets of Yanchep National Park.

The school holiday activities, coordinated by CALM ranger Geoff Harnett, attracted almost 250 children and parents.

There were two activities: 'hidden animals', which took the participants in search of animals not usually seen by visitors to the park, and 'adventure caving', which explored the depths of one of the park's many wild caves. Both activities were sold out over the eight-day period.

At 8.30 on a wet Tuesday morning,

by
David Gough

Yanchep Park ranger Therese Jones (or TJ, as she prefers to be called) met a group of two dozen children and parents who had gathered for the hidden animals tour.

After a short talk about animal trapping and the 'rules' of animal observation, they were taken to the northern lakeside to search for traps that had been laid the night before.

Children were split into groups of three and taken, group by group, to the spots where the traps were laid. As it had been a wet night, the success rate was high and more than half of the traps had been sprung.

The children retrieved the traps one by one and released the captured animals into a viewing box, so they could identify the animal and have a closer look. After a couple of minutes it was released and, to the children's delight, scurried back into the undergrowth.

By the end of the activity the children had seen four native bush rats, three house mice and a brown rat.

Cave visit

In the afternoon, another party donned hard hats and collected torches for their visit to a wild cave, near Yanchep Golf Course.

For many it was their

first experience of the magic and mystery of caving. Unlike the tourist caves in the park, this cave had no electric lighting. In fact, it had no lighting at all except for the torch light, which cast mysterious shadows on the ancient wet walls.

According to Geoff Harnett, these activities are a departure from the 'show and tell' method of teaching. Instead, the children are able to 'share and do'.

"By taking part in the activities, children are better able to grasp the importance of what they are learning because they are taking part in a sensory exploration of their environment," Geoff said.

"They'll remember feeling the weight and movement of the animal caught in the trap, and the excitement of seeing it scampering back to its hiding place.

"These feelings have a much greater impact on children and can be used to reinforce their learning about the environment."

The winter activity program was a dry run (or, in some cases, a wet one!) for future programs at the park.

"We would like to develop more of these activities in the spring using professionals and volunteers," Geoff said.

"These activities might include bird walks, spotlighting tours, wildflower walks, and swamp safaris."

There's no doubt the children and parents who took part in the winter school holiday activities learned something more about their natural environment - and they had fun, too!



Children watch Yanchep park ranger Therese Jones transfer animal from trap to viewing box.
Photo by David Gough

