



Hunts of youth revisited. Dr Barry Wilson arrived full circle when he joined CALM and found his office window looked out over Matilda Bay. It was while completing his Ph.D at UWA that he chose this site to study the reproductive cycle of mussels living on pylons.
Photo by Verna Costello

Farewell and hello!

IT WAS almost a case of 'goodbye and hello again' when Director of Nature Conservation Dr Barry Wilson retired at the end of November. Or did he?

In fact, Dr Wilson, whose six-year contract term expired on November 29, decided to explore the assurances of retirement rather than seek a further term.

However, he has agreed to continue working on a consultative basis to complete several aspects of the marine parks program.

Dr Wilson was born at Busselton and spent most of his childhood years with his family in Dunsborough, where the earliest stirrings of an interest in marine shells was preceded by an interest in nature as a whole.

"I was one of those horror-children who kept snakes in the rubbish bin and rotten sea shells in the fridge, scaring my mother out of her wits," Dr Wilson said.

"I began serious study later than most - in my twenties - after working in a variety of occupation - as a carpenter in the north-west and a deckhand in Queensland."

Dr Wilson graduated from the University of WA with an Honours degree in zoology in 1960 and was awarded his Ph.D in 1966.

In 1964 he won a Fulbright Travel Award and was appointed Research Fellow in Malacology (the study of molluscs) at Harvard University.

Dr Wilson was appointed Curator of the Department of Molluscs at WA Museum in 1965, and Head of the Division of Natural Science in 1972.

In 1979 he went to Victoria where he took up an appointment as Director of the National Museum, and remained in that post

for five years.

He returned to WA in April, 1985, when he was appointed Director of Nature Conservation with the then newly-formed Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Looking back on his years with CALM, Dr Wilson said that it was easy to lose sight of CALM's many achievements when grappling with the day-to-day issues in all their complexities, and one tends to see only the major tasks that remain to be dealt with.

"But there've been some astonishing achievements, not the least of which is the cohesiveness that's evolved between the people who came into CALM at about the same time I joined.

"They came from widely disparate backgrounds, bringing with them equally diverse perceptions of what conservation was all about.

"It's something of a miracle that what could have been a recipe for conflict has developed into what Chris Haynes has described as a 'distinctive conservation culture' enriched by the variety of the contributions made by these people.

"The most obvious achievement has been the very substantial increase in the conservation estate with the establishment of the marine parks, national parks and nature reserves.

"Another significant breakthrough I've witnessed has been the overcoming of local opposition and the gaining of cooperation of local communities, particularly when establishment of a national or a marine park is first proposed.

"Usually, this is brought about by establishing rapport with the people likely to be affected, listening to

by
Verna Costello

their concerns, explaining exactly what is proposed and how their wishes might be accommodated, (without compromising sound conservation principles) and enlisting their cooperation in achieving what eventually become mutual goals.

"This has been particularly rewarding for me where I've had direct involvement - the establishment of Ningaloo and Shark Bay Marine Parks, for example.

"It's early days yet, but substantial gains have been made in this regard at Shark Bay and I'm optimistic that we'll see increasing cooperation between CALM and the local community.

"Along similar lines has been the gradual but very significant and mutually beneficial development of positive relationships between CALM and Aboriginal people.

"As for my involvement in the new nature conservation strategy, it has been most satisfying to see how this has developed, largely, out of ideas from the body of the department, rather than exclusively from the top, ideas that reflect a depth and commitment from its many contributors.

"During the early years much of our energies were channelled into land management - and rightly so - we needed to get our own house in order first.

"Somewhat less attention was given to interacting with 'people out there' and dealing with conservation issues on private lands and other "off-reserve" areas, not because we thought them unimportant but because

DID YOU HEAR the one about the racehorse goanna, the chuditch, the hollow log and the chainsaw?

During the past 12 months Collie District staff led by forest officer Brad Barton have been involved in monitoring numbers of

woylies, chuditches, possums in light of a fox baiting program in Battaling State Forest.

One of the tasks involves fitting radio transmitter collars to the woylies, chuditches, etc to keep track of any increase or decrease in their

Science bible

OF INTEREST to all CALM scientists are three leaflets produced by the Royal Society of Western Australia, announcing the publication of a new bibliography of scientific achievements in WA:

- A Bibliography and Index to the Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia Volumes 1-70 (Supplement to Volume 74, 1991 - expected publication date October 1991);
- The Leeuwin Current: an influence on the coastal

climate and marine life of Western Australia - Proceedings of the Leeuwin Current Symposium, held March 1991. (Volume 7 of the Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia - expected publication date December 1991)

- Recent Advances in Science in Western Australia
- Letters to the Editor. (Two new columns for Western Australian scientists in the Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia beginning with Volume 75, 1992).

we probably sensed that we'd better 'get it right' before we could hope to talk to people and gain their respect and support.

"In more recent years this attention has expanded to encompass these areas, vital to the accomplishment of CALM's goals.

"With shrinking resources, the enormous tasks before us can't be dealt with entirely by CALM. They are community issues and need community solutions.

"Where once, there may have been apathy, there's now a great deal of willingness and a growing commitment among the public to hop in and help get things done.

"And CALM can play a crucial supportive role through its technical expertise.

"Why retire when I'm having so much fun? Well, it's true that I've enjoyed my time with CALM, but I feel a growing need to 'get back among the marine shells'."

"I've always found human relationships satisfying but there's a serene wholesomeness about nature that I miss."

Dr Wilson is an experienced skindiver, underwater photographer and field biologist, and has taken part in several major marine biological expeditions in the Pacific and south-east Asian region. He has written extensively on marine shells and coral reef ecology in Australia and is regarded internationally as a world authority on the subject.

"I'm also working on a major revision of my book, Australian Shells (first published in 1971), with my daughter Carina providing the illustrations."

Dr Wilson lives in

Kallaroo with his Russian wife Valentina and has three children from his first marriage.

Apart from Carina there is another daughter (Jinni), studying anthropology and a son (Alex), living at Margaret River. Valentina has a married daughter (Alo) and two grandchildren also living in Vladivostok.

Asked if he cherishes any other aspirations, Dr Wilson confessed to a long time empathy with indigenous people, not only Australian Aborigines, but others such as the Polynesian people he met some 20 years ago on Kapingimarangi, a remote Pacific atoll, where he was studying the Crown of Thorns starfish.

"These people are subject to the same rules of ecologically sustainable development as we are, but with much more limited resources available to them.

"The balancing act required of them just to survive is worthy of closer look, which is what I'd like to do, and later complete a book on my findings.



Curtin University students their appreciation.
Photo by Verna Costello

