

Overseas biologists in Tammin

ONE of the most illustrious groups of biologists to meet outside Perth arrived at Tammin for a five-day workshop last month.

Among the 37 participants were 14 biologists from overseas with Sweden, Finland, Norway, Great Britain, Canada and the USA all represented.

Stanford University professor of population studies and biological sciences Paul Ehrlich was one of the best known of the overseas visitors.

Specialising in ecology, human ecology, evolution and behaviour, Professor Ehrlich has published a series of textbooks and several hundred scientific papers in these fields.

In 1989, he received the first Science in the Service of Humankind Prize, awarded by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Providing a distinctly local flavour and viewpoint were Jos Chatfield and Don Couper representing local farmers, and Ken Wallace the CALM regional manager for the wheatbelt.

The conference was arranged to discuss the reconstruction of fragmented ecosystems at both a global and regional level. Put

more simply, the aim was to discuss what we knew about managing remnant vegetation, and what this means at both global and local scales.

The conference started at the global scale, and the early papers certainly reminded us that planet earth has a few problems, and that we can't ignore events occurring elsewhere in the biosphere when we manage locally. If we do, we will probably be overtaken by external events.

However, the world consists of many local areas joined together. To solve the problems of the world requires work at a local level.

"Thank goodness!" we all thought. Global is too depressing, let's get to something we can all understand, the local situation.

Unfortunately, people like UWA emeritus professor of zoology Bert Main and Florida ecologist Dan Simberloff didn't let us off the hook and were quick to point out that we were, on the whole a pretty naive bunch, and even some of our new pushes, such as that into reconstructing linkages (corridors) between remnant vegetation areas, had a nega-

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tive as well as a positive side.

Fortunately, the conference papers were broken by a day touring Tammin farms looking at land degradation issues and solutions, including a session at the Charles Gairdner Nature Reserve at which Bert Main demonstrated once again

his unrivalled grasp of local natural history. About 50 local people joined conference participants for the field trip, and for most overseas visitors this day was a highlight. The opportunity to discuss local issues on the ground with local people was greatly appreciated.

As with all conferences, the opportunity to meet and talk with a diverse group of people, particularly in a live-in situation, resulted

in many useful ideas and the transfer of valuable information. I learnt much from the conference and was surprised at how much we could learn from places such as Norway.

It was also interesting to be reminded again of CALM's low profile in agricultural issues, and the importance of adequately integrating 'academic' research and practical knowledge to successfully manage land.



Pictured with CALM's Wheatbelt Regional Manager Ken Wallace (centre) are visiting biologists Yrjo Haila (left) from Helsinki University, Finland, and Dan Simberloff from Florida State University, USA.



