

# A matter of course

by Carolyn Thomson

When Jean Collins, who organises University of Western Australia extension courses, discovered CALM she found a rich vein of talent.

The courses Jean has organised with CALM have included a natural history course at Shark Bay with district manager Ron Shepherd, frogs of the Ludlow tuart forest with researcher Grant Wardell-Johnson and a marine discovery weekend at the Shoalwater Bay Marine Park with Rae Burrows, Terry Goodlich and John Edwards.

However, 'A wild weekend with CALM' was the first University Extension course run by CALM staff and remains one of the most popular, having

now been held 10 times.

The course, which is usually taken by researchers Per Christensen and Graeme Liddelow, explains the ecology of the animals, including endangered numbats, tammars, woylies, possums and chuditch, of the Perup forest east of Manjimup.

People love the opportunity to go spotlighting each night and then look for the signs of where the animals have been the next day. A brushtail possum nests in the stove at the centre and bandicoots live underneath the house.

"I think that part of its appeal is because the title worked so well - it makes it sound like a fun learning experience," said Jean, "people rave about the wild

weekend and several enjoyed it so much that they have done it a second time."

It was so successful that 'Wildflowers of the Perup' and 'Birds of the Perup forest' are now also being offered.

The course lecture fees and accommodation charges are put back in to the centre at Perup to help the Department maintain it, while the fees for the Shark Bay course go towards dolphin research at Monkey Mia.

Participation in such courses also helps CALM to explain innovative research and management of complex ecosystems to interested people.

Extension courses are run four times each year and Jean needs to dream up about 100 courses over that period. Fortunately, her bubbly personality and vivid imagination help her to generate ideas.

"I look for courses that are different to the usual tourist offerings," she said, "and working with departments such as CALM gives the public access to otherwise inaccessible areas and experiences."

Some ideas come from newspaper articles or just talking to people. At other times, Jean will plan a trip to a location such as Exmouth and call in to all



the tourist bureaux and CALM offices along the way, meeting people and checking out resources, such as charter boats and accommodation.

"I love my job, especially when I'm planning new things, and I meet a lot of interesting people," said Jean.

"But there's also the humdrum side to it. If you don't look after the smallest details a course can go horribly wrong. So I rehearse the course in my mind to make sure I have got everything right. Quite often that happens about 3 am in the morning."

Jean also arranges natural history courses with people like Boyd Wykes from Perth Wildlife Watch, ornithologists from the RAOU and other experts like John Colwill and Nick Gales.

Any CALM employees with ideas for courses in their area or who would like further information on course programs should call Jean on (09) 380 2579.



Left: Dr Per Christensen releases a brush-tail possum during a 'Wild Weekend at Perup'. Top: Jean Collins. Photos-Carolyn Thomson.

