

Spotlight on fire science



Copies of *LANDSCOPE* are kept at Como, where stores officers Craig Simpson, left, and Neil Moore each cast an expert eye over the latest issue of the award-winning magazine. Photo by Verna Costello

Clean sweep for *LANDSCOPE*

A CLEAN sweep of the annual Alex Harris Medal awards and a public relations award for excellence in communication completed a successful month for CALM's flagship publication *LANDSCOPE*.

Three *LANDSCOPE* stories won awards for excellence in science and environmental writing in the third annual competition for the highly coveted Alex Harris Medal.

Chief wildlife officer with CALM Dave Mell, and co-author John Wetherall of Curtin University's School of Biomedical Science, won the Alex Harris Medal for

a story entitled *To Catch a Thief*. The story documents how DNA fingerprinting has made it possible for CALM wildlife officers and Curtin University scientists to disprove claims by unscrupulous bird breeders that they can breed rare species of cockatoos. The process has also provided valuable data to assist legitimate breeders with their breeding programs.

CALM Communications officer David Gough's story, *In Search of the Perfect Pine*, on breeding programs to improve pines in WA (Autumn 1992); and *Hunters and Gatherers*, by

CALM wildlife officer Trevor Walley and WA Museum head of anthropology Peter Bindon (Spring 1992), on use of plants and animals in the south-west by Nyongar Aborigines, received the two commendation certificates.

The awards were presented at a special ceremony held at Curtin University as part of the recent Australia New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) Congress on September 30.

Earlier in the month *LANDSCOPE* also won the 1993 Award for Outstanding External

Communication in the second annual Public Relations Institute (WA) Awards for Excellence.

The award was accepted on behalf of CALM by director of Corporate Relations Ron Kawalilak.

Ron said the award recognised the magazine's success in creating community interest in conservation and land management issues, programs and successes in WA.

"It also recognises *LANDSCOPE*'s role in getting the wider community involved with CALM in preventing and solving conservation and land management problems," he said.

FIRE researchers, land managers and others involved in fire management gathered in Perth last month to look at the latest advances and concepts in bush fire science.

Forging links

Landscape Fires '93, hosted by CALM and the Bush Fires Board at Como, focused on forging links between fire behaviour and fire ecology.

Six sessions covered issues such as new developments in fire danger rating and fire behaviour, fire measurements for fire ecology and the interaction among fire, plants and animals.

A major part of the conference was dedicated to bushfires and the urban interface, with speakers from Victoria, NSW, the ACT and WA canvassing the technological and social aspects of wild fires and controlled burns.

CALM General Manager Roger Underwood, in officially opening the conference, said fire was probably the single most controversial and demanding issue facing land management agencies in Australia.

It was controversial because agencies such as CALM had to negotiate a minefield of complex interactions among social values, legislation,

by Nigel Higgs

environmental values, science and conflicting community expectations.

"More often than not we find ourselves caught in the crossfire between interest groups or trying to develop compromises with uncompromising people," he said.

Demanding

"Fire also is the most demanding because the cost of getting it wrong is so large and because accountability for getting it wrong is so obvious.

"If people or townships are consumed in a bushfire, and CALM's or the Bush Fire Board's policies or fire protection measures are found to have been deficient or irresponsible, we are in huge trouble, even as individuals."

He said the biggest difficulty in implementing fire policies came from urban people who were completely unthreatened by bush fires and who didn't see it as their problem.

"I don't yet have the solution to this problem but I do know that if managers, rural communities and environmentalists can work together cooperatively, then fire protection and environmental out-comes always will be higher than if they don't," he said.

Some of the key points to emerge from the papers and discussions were:

- The dynamic influence of fire in the landscape and the fact vegetation inevitably changes with time.
- The need to consider management applications of fire in the context of fire as a natural disturbance.
- Benefits that result from collaboration between people studying different aspects of fire.
- The need for effective communication between researchers and managers.

The landscape fires conferences were initiated six years ago by the Mathematics Department of the Australian Defence Academy in Canberra.

The concept originally was to provide a forum in which people working in fire science could get together.

The forum now has broadened to include fire managers.

This year's gathering was the fourth conference but the first held away from the Defence Academy campus.

This year's conference was organised by a team including Neil Burrows, Gordon Friend, Lachy McCaw from CALM and Malcolm Gill from CSIRO Canberra.



Principal research scientist Gordon Friend, and Melinda Brouwer from The Australian Heritage Commission in Canberra, study one of the displays at the Landscape Fires '93 Conference. Photo by Verna Costello



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