

Fox fight takes to air

MONTHS of strategic planning came to a head last month when Western Australia's biggest native wildlife recovery program — Operation Foxglove — swung into action.

On April 18, the first aircraft took off from Jandakot to begin 'bombing' runs over the forest between Mundaring and Harvey.

The 'ammunition' was dried meat baits containing 1080 — a toxin that occurs naturally in Western Australia's 'poison peas', the genus *Gastrolobium*.

Next month, the exercise will step up a further notch and the planes will begin targeting further parts of the 450,000 hectares of the northern jarrah forest between Mundaring and Collie.

Operation Foxglove is an initiative of the Department of Conservation and Land Management and Alcoa of Australia — to reduce fox numbers to that small native mammal populations have a chance to recover.

For several of species, the program could mean the difference between survival and local extinction.

Operation Foxglove Project Manager Roger Armstrong said CALM and the Agriculture Protection Board had spent months planning the operation.

"It is one of the most integrated exercises CALM has undertaken as it has involved virtually every facet of the Department," Roger said.

Maps have been prepared with detailed flight-lines along which air crews will fly dropping baits at a rate of five over a square kilometre. Space-age satellite navigation technology such as global positioning systems is helping ensure the 'bombing' is as accurate and effective as possible.

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Foxglove takes to the air



(Above) Left to right, pilot Tim Hesford with CALM trainee aerial foxbaiters: forest workers Ross Sturges, (Collie), 'Nibs' Morganti and Chas Casotti (Mundaring), and Leanne Leadbitter (Collie); forester John Asher and senior environmental officer Roger Armstrong.

Remote control photo by Roger Armstrong

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Initially forest areas between Mundaring and Harvey were baited.

A control area between Dwellingup and Collie will enable researchers to study the dynamics of fox populations before it is baited in three years time.

This research will help further refine baiting regimes so that the operation is as effective as possible.

Other study sites have been set up outside the forest around Bannister and west of Beverley.

Alcoa of Australia's bauxite mines around Jarrahdale and Dwellingup are being baited as part of the company's forest fauna rehabilitation work.

Warning signs have been posted throughout the areas being baited and the public has been urged not to take pet dogs into these areas.

"1080 is lethal to dogs and foxes although native mammals can tolerate relatively high levels because the compound occurs naturally in *Gastrolobium*," Roger said.

The dried meat baits are extremely unpalatable to humans and consequently do not pose a risk.

However, in the remote chance people do stumble across a bait, they are asked not to disturb it.

Recovery of populations of native fauna such as numbats, woylies, phascogales and other species will not only conserve the State's biodiversity, it also will create nature-based tourism opportunities of international standing.

CALM has produced an information booklet on Operation Foxglove. Copies are available through CALM offices.



(Left) Project leader John Forster (left) and programs manager Ray Fieldgate checking Operations Foxglove map at the inkjet colour plotter.

Photo by Verna Costello

(Below) CALM forest worker Leanne Leadbitter sits beside the bait hopper and listens as pilot Tim Hesford goes through a 'dry run' before the trial fox-baiting flight.

Photo by Verna Costello



STAFF NEWS

Appointments

Nicole Saunders, Officer, Geraldton; Kim Cream, Officer, Records Branch, Como

Transfers

Greg Kitson from Construction and Maintenance Worker, Pentstemon to Park Maintenance Worker, Kalbarri National Park; Doreen Dore, from Records Management Officer,

King Leopold Range National Park, Derby; Darren Ball from Forest Ranger, Forest Management Branch, Kelmscott to Forest Ranger, Dwellingup; Peter Gibson from Forest Ranger, Jarrahdale to Forest Ranger, Forest Management Branch, Kelmscott; Anne Greig from Ranger, Yanchep National Park to Information Officer, Pilbara Region.

Promotions







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