

Western Shield: the way to recovery



Children from East Fremantle Primary School and Helena College, Darlington, helped Environment Minister Peter Foss release woylies into The Hills Forest at Mundaring to mark the launch of Western Shield. Photo by Ross Swansborough

A BREAKTHROUGH in the recovery of an endangered native mammal has opened the way for CALM to implement the biggest wildlife conservation program ever undertaken in Australia.

The initiative—*Western Shield*—will see a five-fold increase to almost 5 million hectares in the area baited to control introduced predators such as the European fox and feral cat. These animals have been largely responsible for the extinction of 10 species of native mammals, and have driven a further 31 species to the brink.

Environment Minister Peter Foss said the program would build on a dramatic recovery of the woylie.

CALM's feral predator control in the past 10 years has seen natural and re-established populations of woylies increase so significantly that the Minister accepted a recommendation of the Woylie Recovery Team and the Threatened Fauna Scientific Advisory Committee to take the species off the threatened list under the WA Wildlife Conservation Act.

The species is now also listed formally as 'Conservation Dependent' under World Conservation Union guidelines.

Biggest weapon

At the launch of *Western Shield* in The Hills Forest, Mundaring, Mr Foss said feral predator control was the single biggest weapon in the armoury to bring native wildlife back from the brink of extinction.

"Existing fox-baiting programs, such as *Operation Foxglove* in the northern jarrah forest between Julimar and Collie, and target areas such as the Perup Nature Reserve and Kingston forest block near Manjimup, and Dryandra Woodland near Narrogin, are yielding outstanding results," he said.

Western Shield will not only play a vital role in conserving Western Australia's biological diversity, it will be a major key in the development of the State's nature-based tourism industry.

Tourism benefits

By controlling feral predators and re-establishing colonies of these species in their former natural range, visitors to WA will be able to see wild populations of native animals such as numbats, rufous hare wallabies, banded hare wallabies, boodies and malleefowl.

Western Shield will integrate and co-ordinate existing feral predator operations such as *Foxglove*, and *Project Eden* on the Peron Peninsula in Shark Bay. It will also establish other priority areas for fox and feral cat control.

These include Cape Arid and Cape Le Grande near Esperance; Ravensthorpe Range, Stirling Range, Two Peoples Bay, Fitzgerald River, Waychincup and Lake Magenta along the South Coast; D'Entrecasteaux, Walpole-Nornalup and the Valley of the Giants near Walpole; the sunlands between Nannup and Augusta-Busselton; the eastern jarrah and wandoo forest between Collie and Walpole; Kalbarri; and many smaller reserves throughout the wheatbelt.

Extending target areas

Other target areas are CALM-managed pastoral lands in the Goldfields, Cape Range and the Montebello Islands in the Pilbara.

The aim is to begin expanding the area baited for foxes in the South West now, and to expand into the more arid areas when further research has been carried out into feral cats.

CALM is stepping up its \$120,000 commitment to cat research by investing a further \$240,000 in this work. One priority is to find better bait mediums that will result in a higher uptake of baits by cats.

As well, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency is helping fund research and implementing recovery plans for many species that will benefit from the new fox and feral cat control initiative.

Another aim of *Western Shield* is to protect fauna that

Children's activities to conserve wildlife

PRIMARY school children are being encouraged to help conserve wildlife through an activities program focusing on Western Australia's threatened species.

The *Western Shield Action Pack* has been prepared by CALM to help stimulate a greater public awareness of the State's distinctive fauna, and to encourage positive community attitudes towards their conservation and pro-

tection. Environment Minister Peter Foss said WA shared the worst record in the world for mammal extinctions.

"Already 10 species have become extinct and a further 31 are on the brink," he said.

"We have an obligation to our children, and their children, to ensure that no more species become extinct because of human activity."

Mr Foss said the action

pack was an extension of the *Western Shield* wildlife recovery initiative being implemented this year. *Western Shield*—Australia's biggest wildlife conservation program—aims to control introduced predators such as foxes and feral cats which have been key factors in pushing species of small native animals to the edge of extinction.

The program involves baiting almost five million hectares of the State's con-

servation estate using a naturally-occurring toxin that is fatal to foxes and cats, but to which native species have developed a high tolerance.

Mr Foss said he was concerned that most people in WA—particularly children—were more aware of African or American wildlife than our own. Yet Western Australia's native wildlife was not only among the most biologically diverse on earth, many of our spe-

cies were to be found nowhere else.

"The *Western Shield Action Pack* has been produced because, without doubt, conservation efforts can be greatly enhanced if people understand the nature of our wildlife, including the partnerships—or synergies—our flora and fauna have developed," Mr Foss said.

The pack has been designed for upper primary

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CALM Mundaring nature conservation officer John Carter (left) and Darling Range MLA John Day take a closer look at a woylie during the launch of Western Shield. Photo by Ross Swansborough

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may be at threat when the rabbit calicivirus disease spreads—or is released formally—into WA and predators turn to native animals to fill the food gap.

CALM will also begin a major campaign to involve landowners, through Land

Conservation District Committees, in feral predator programs to extend the total area over which these feral predators are controlled.

"*Western Shield* is not a complete answer in itself to foxes and feral cats—rather, it can be likened to estab-

lishing a beachhead in the lead up to the main event—the introduction of biological controls. However, such controls are unlikely to be available for at least another decade," Mr Foss said.

"We can't wait 10 years—too many native species on the brink now."

