



Rod Martyn shows where tortoises can now move safely under the fence.

Photo by Roger Markham

## Tortoises protected

CALM's Perth District staff believe they have solved a problem at Thomson's Lake, where a number of tortoises attempting to move outside the reserve were impeded by the vermin-proof fence. Some had become dehydrated and died along the inside of the fence.

The movement of tortoises did not occur consistently, and is believed to be associated with females moving long distances to lay eggs in spring and early summer. Others migrate between wetlands, partly during the past summer when Thomsons's Lake dried.

Only a small percentage are believed to have migrated from the reserve, with most burying themselves under the mud in

the lake as the surface dried.

The solution? Two tortoise gates were built and set under water in ponds built directly under the vermin-proof fence at locations where tortoises were known to gather.

Perth District staff Rod Martyn and Lyndon Mutter designed the ponds and gates, on the advice of University of Western Australia research scientist Gerald Kuchling.

Overseer Glen Hughes built a concrete prototype pond, and the second pond (an improvement on the first) was built using fibreglass.

The concept appears to be successful. At one stage, five tortoises were observed using the ponds, where they appeared to be spending some time rehydrating

before moving on.

Long-necked, or oblong, tortoises (*Chelodina oblonga*) are common in freshwater wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain.

They lay clutches of up to 25 eggs which hatch in August and September, many of which are predated upon or perish before making it to the wetlands.

The tortoises are carnivorous, feeding on fish, molluscs and crustaceans.

While the vermin-proof fence impeded movement of some tortoises, its benefit to the tortoise population overall has outweighed the disadvantages.

Before the fence was built, many migrating and nesting tortoises fell victim to foxes, and freshly dead tortoises were often seen with their heads bitten off, possibly by cats.











## Welcome to Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve

Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve is an important habitat for waterbirds and is listed as such under the international RAMSAR Agreement. Among those attracted to the Reserve are tiny migratory wading birds that come here from as far away as Siberia to feed and escape the rigours of the northern winters.




The Reserve is also home to a large variety of animals - from aquatic invertebrates, frogs and tortoises, to possums, western grey kangaroos, bandicoots, snakes and lizards.

The area is big enough to support healthy populations of all these animals provided that feral predators like cats and foxes are removed, and competition from rabbits is reduced.

The first stage in this process was to build the venem proof fence. The second step is to eliminate the pests from within the Reserve by laying poison baits.

### POISON RISK AREA

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is periodically baiting the area with "1080" baits. The baits are harmless to native wildlife but are poisonous to humans and domestic animals.

 Dogs and cats are not permitted within the Reserve.

Please be sure you close the gates and help us help our special wildlife.

Contact CALM in Wanneroo for more information (Tel. 405 1222)



Department of Conservation and Land Management

*Caring .... Naturally*















































