



Even a scientist needs a caffeine fix once in a while. With not a syringe in sight, Per Christensen prepares his 'fix' during a break in the interview for this story. Photo by Verna Costello

Per Christensen 'retires' to a long list of projects

SENIOR principal research scientist Per Christensen has joined the small group of people opting to strike out on their own. While he has left CALM, he is not entirely lost to us and he will work on a contract basis on several CALM projects.

These include Project Eden on the Peron Peninsula some work on forest fauna and continuing involvement with LANDSCOPE Expeditions.

Per's career with the department has seen him (and by association CALM itself) notch up many significant achievements that have provided him with a great deal of well-justified satisfaction.

His advent into CALM as acting superintendent of research was at the time of the department's formation in 1985. This was preceded by 17 years with the Forests Department, first as assistant district forest officer, rising to research superintendent in 1985, from which position he moved to CALM and its Manjimup Research Centre.

Solid background

It was at here, that Per's background as both a botanist and a zoologist, as well as a solid working background in forestry, would quickly prove invaluable in researching the relationship between prescribed burning and/or logging and the diminishing numbers of native plant and animal species.

Subsequent to this research, Per was the first scientist to draw attention to the mounting evidence, gathered by him and others, that pointed towards introduced predators, particularly the fox, and not logging and prescribed burning, as the chief cause of the disappearance of

native animals.

Around this time Per floated the idea of establishing fauna priority areas within the forest. The first to be established was at the Perup, where six threatened animal species were found: the woylie (since taken off the threatened list), the tammar, the ringtail possum, the numbat, the chuditch, and the southern brown bandicoot.

Gazetting reserve

Per was also one of the prime movers in setting up the reserve system in the southern forest. Some of the priority areas have since become national parks and nature reserves, and have been added to.

Another important achievement Per looks on with some pride was the successful proposal to have an area near the Hay River, in the eastern part of the State forest close to Denmark gazetted as a nature reserve. The area later became Mount Lindsay National Park. Other projects, spearheaded by Per include:

Desert Dreaming, a project that confirmed suspicions that the cat, as well as the fox, was a formidable enemy of WA native animals.

Project Eden on Peron Peninsula, where both fox and cat numbers have been significantly reduced.

LANDSCOPE Expeditions. The pilot expedition was so successful, that within six months another half dozen expeditions were initiated.

But what of Per Christensen, before his Forests Department days? His name gives a clue, and you'd be right in surmising that his birthplace might be found somewhere in Scandinavia, and if you thought 'Denmark', you'd

be spot on.

When he was nine years old, his family left Denmark to settle in Kenya, where his parents ran a pyrethrum farm.

Per left high school, immediately after gaining his school certificate, and began work in the Forests department as a trainee forester.

On completion of his training, Per spent three years working on a forest station, and as a research technical assistant, where he became interested in researching *Dothistrona pini*, a serious disease of *Pinus radiata* in areas of very high rainfall. (The area he was working in had a 90-inch annual rainfall.) He co-authored two papers on the disease, and was the main author of a third.

Then came national service training, which was compulsory in Kenya.

In 1963, Per married Helen in Kenya; they then moved to South Africa, where their daughter Catherine was born.

The responsibilities that came with married life and parenthood, motivated Per to attend Rhodes University where he completed a double major in botany and zoology, gaining honours in botany. (Per later added to these accomplishments by completing his PhD at UWA with a thesis on the effects of fire on the woylie and the tammar wallaby.)

In time, Per's breadth of expertise and experience was to cover research on fire ecology and plants and animals, as well as softwood and hardwood silviculture and pathology.

With the increasing uncertainty for Europeans in Kenya and South Africa, the Christensens looked around for somewhere they might bring up a family with a better degree of

certainty. They decided on Western Australia.

The Christensen family arrived in WA, in 1968, and went immediately to Manjimup where Per began work for the Forests Department in karri silviculture and dieback research.

With regard to his career path, Per sees himself as having 'drifted upwards' rather than as a person 'driven' relentlessly by ambition to get to the top of his profession as fast as possible.

Driving force

"A quest for greater knowledge has always been the driving force for me, and a desire to see results put to some useful purpose. Desert Dreaming, Project Eden, and my input into the reserve system are examples," Per said.

"I've also been fortunate in having staff who are self-starters and themselves interested in a positive outcome.

Off duty, Per is an avid participant in sport; he is a strong swimmer, has taken part in many of the Blackwood marathon relays and played hockey until he was nearly 40.

Family is a high priority with Per and Helen, who have four adult children: Catherine, Jacqueline, Warren and Sheena. They have one granddaughter, Ruby (3), and two grandsons, Dane (2), and Jake (2 months).

A story as short as this does scant justice to someone with Per's achievements, and those who know him well will, no doubt, wonder about the omissions. But these must await a biographer who is less at the mercy of space limitations.

While Per will be very much missed at CALM, his colleagues and friends wish him every success and happiness in his new venture.

JOB No 304/1

32

32A



33

33A



34

34A



35

35A



36

36A



32

KODAK 5053 TMY

33

KODAK 5053 TMY

34

KODAK 5053 TMY

35

KODAK 5053 TMY

36

KODAK 5053 TMY