

Where have all the graduates gone?

WHEN someone posed the question, "Where are they now?" (meaning graduates of the Field Officer Skills-based Training Course) it was decided to answer with a regular feature in CALM NEWS.

Megan Hughes, herself a graduate, and whose story appeared in the September-October issue, agreed to write about Rebecca Wolstenholme, Greg Evans and John Marshall, with Tammie Reid reporting on Stuart Harrison and Mark Virgo.

One of the constantly recurring challenges during the writing of the stories was pinning graduates down for interview, with the sometimes sudden switching by the graduate from one role in one place to another elsewhere.

Rebecca Wolstenholme, for example, was away dealing with a wildfire, while Stuart Harrison, was urgently called away from an interview on another mission.

We begin with Megan Hughes story on Rebecca Wolstenholme.

Rebecca Wolstenholme: Located at Moora District Rebecca was appointed as a conservation officer to implement the management program for declared rare, and poorly known flora in the district

A three-year program, federally funded by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA), it aims to ensure the continued survival of endangered populations in the wild.

Rebecca has a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Science and in Populations, Resource and Technology from Murdoch University.

Her interest in the natural environment stems from growing up on a farm in the south-west of England, and living on the coast near Perth, where she enjoyed boating and diving.

"During my final year at university, I completed a one-year project, looking at ecotourism, and focusing on tour-boat operators along the WA coast, with the Marine Branch at Hillarys," she said.

"Armed with this background and my degree, I sought a career with CALM because of the diversity of work the department offers.

"My first position after graduating from the Field Officer Course, was as reserves officer for the Merredin District.

"My duties involved rare flora work, seed collection for rehabilitation projects, and helping with the recreation and tourism plan for the Merredin District, as well as a variety of wildlife tasks."



Marking trees with a giant 'H' for 'habitat' is one of many tasks carried out during the training courses. Seen here are former course participants, from left: Mark Virgo, Greg Evans, Rebecca Wolstenholme, Stuart Harrison and, in the foreground, John Marshall. Photo by Tammie Reid.

At present, Rebecca is implementing the Moora District Threatened Flora Management Plan. This entails the overseeing and endorsement of the recommended management actions necessary to recover the species.

Management includes extensive surveys of the species, notifying land owners of populations, fencing off and marking of the populations, and weed control.

"Moora District is botanically very special. Within the area, three botanical districts merge, the Irwin, the Avon and the Darling, resulting in a high diversity of species," Rebecca says.

"I often work with people other than those in the District office—staff from the Herbarium, for example—as well as WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit (WATSCU), Wildlife Protection Branch and Kings Park and Botanic Gardens.

"There's also contact with people from other government departments such as Main Roads and Westrail, and local government authorities; all involved in the recovery process of rare flora.

"I often communicate with farmers who have rare flora, or the potential for it on their land.

"It's this challenge of communicating effectively with people from such a wide variety of backgrounds that I enjoy, plus the diversity of my works

program.

"I like getting out of the office, and as my work requires to take frequent trips out into the field, it suits me perfectly.

Commenting on the Skills-based Training Course, Rebecca said that the group training sessions at the Dwellingup Centre had been beneficial to her career with CALM.

"Apart from the information we received, it was great for team-building skills, and those who went through it have formed a special bond," she said.

"Our senior trainer, Alan Byrne, and other trainers and guest speakers passed on useful information, and it was a great opportunity to meet staff from different districts within CALM.

"I've already put much of what I've learnt to use at both Merredin and Moora, Rebecca said.

Mark Virgo: is located at Walpole District, but he is also involved in helping Pemberton District with their Forest Resources Program.

He spends about 90 per cent of the time in the Forest Resources Program, but has some opportunities to work in other programs, such as nature conservation, where he has recently enjoyed helping Carl Beck with his invertebrate surveys.)

Qualifications: Associate Diploma in Environmental Technology from Kalgoorlie

College.

Background: Mark began working with CALM as a leading hand in the Goldfields Region's premises at Kalgoorlie, before applying for the

field officer intake. Encouraged by CALM staff at Kalgoorlie, Mark, who was interested in a change and had heard lots of interesting stories about the work that went on in other areas of CALM, was keen to try it out.

At present Mark is responsible for harvesting contractors who are setting up coupes, ensuring the environmental checks are completed, and supervising the operations.

He is also involved in the silvicultural side of operations, under the guidance of Walpole operations officer Donna Green. He has some involvement with road construction and helping out with the district's prescribed burning program, where he has been taking on more responsibility as experience and training accumulates.

Mark says that the challenge of putting the mind to work and getting the paper work and planning right, as well as the field work are what he enjoys most about his work.

"There's a good mix of responsibilities, office and field work, as well as the opportunity to see some new country, and to work in the karri forests," Mark said.

Commenting on the Skills-based Training Course, Mark said that a lot was condensed into the three-week sessions.

"Obviously the short courses couldn't cover absolutely everything, so it certainly helped that I'd had some field work before the training," Mark said.

"Another advantage is the tremendous spirit of camaraderie when we get together and share experiences with each other, particularly when we've been in similar situations.

"Basically, I'm enjoying getting out and applying what I've learnt from the Dwellingup training sessions, and adding to this knowledge with what I'm learning from the Walpole district staff.

"They're a great bunch of people, who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise."

Greg Evans: Located at Manjimup District, but is also involved in helping Pemberton District with supervision of coupe harvesting crews.

About 95 per cent of his time at Manjimup is taken up with the Forest Resources Program, which includes treemarking, and road construction, as well as CALM fire operations.

The rest of the time, Greg carries out occasional assignments such as implementing trapping, and monitoring animal population levels.

Greg gained his Bachelor of

Science in Forestry at the Australian National University in 1994, Canberra. Before this, he completed one semester of Natural Resources Management at Roseworthy Agricultural College in South Australia, his home State. This was cut short because he ran out of one of life's essentials—money!

To rectify this lack, Greg worked as a 2nd-class machinist with a woodwork machinery company for about three and a half years before undertaking his degree course. He applied for a field officer position with CALM soon after graduating.

Greg e... joys spending the best part of his time involved in the diversity of tasks that go with

"The staff have been helpful, passing on the benefit of their experience, ... made the transition into the job so much smoother." Greg

forest management. Also highly challenging to Greg is fire protection.

About the Skills-based Training Course, Greg says he found it provided an excellent foundation of information on a wide diversity of CALM issues, especially those that related specifically to WA forestry and dieback management.

"The staff down here have also been more than helpful in passing on their knowledge, giving me the benefit of their experience, which has made the transition into the job so much smoother," Greg said.

"It's this challenge of communicating effectively with people from such a wide variety of backgrounds that I enjoy"

