



Cheryl Burke and Phil Forsyth are unfazed by this giant feral 'tom'. Photo by Debra Burke

## West Kimberley a clear winner

**SHINJU Matsuri is Broome's famous Festival of the Pearl, an annual highlight of the Kimberley community calendar and now in its 28th year.**

This year's Shinju Float Parade was the biggest ever, with 52 floats.

The parade always features Sammy the Dragon, drummers, street performers, masked children, giant puppets—and more—in celebration of the town's multicultural history, community spirit, pride and humour.

The parade starts near the Shire library, winds through Chinatown, past a judging panel on the Carnarvon Street roundabout, and finishes on the Town Oval.

### Something big

For weeks, 'broomeours' circulated the town that CALM was preparing something big for this year's Shinju Float Parade—and indeed it was!

Supported by an Arts WA grant, District manager Allen Grosse commissioned local artists Gwen Knox and Naomi Dann to construct, with the help of volunteers, one giant life-

by Tim Willing

like bilby and one giant feral cat.

"From basic drawings, skeleton frameworks of pliable cane steadily grew in stature in the old nursery building," said Allen

Thousands of newspapers later, the papier-mâché bilby and cat had taut 'skins' ready for final painting.

### Long hours

Artists and volunteers worked long hours into the evenings, to ensure an unmoveable deadline could be met.

Starting 39th in a sea of vehicle-mounted floats, CALM West Kimberley District's essential theme was feral cats and the danger they pose to the survival of bilbies and other wildlife.

CALM's display was headed by a Toyota utility, driven by Derby ranger-in-charge Ian Solomon, and decked out with *Western Shield* balloons and giant feral cat cartoons, courtesy of Environment Australia and the Department of Natural Resources and

Environment, Victoria.

From the vehicle, lollies, balloons and bilby stickers were distributed to children in the passing crowd by a team with a remarkable resemblance to CALM spouses (Eve Solomon and Alison Spencer). CALM-Rubibi's Aboriginal ranger Mary Councillor and the District manager's daughter Sarah Grosse.

Dancing behind the vehicle were performing artists Bobbie Anderson and Sassa Middleton in lizard suits, leaping wildlife carer Haidi Kotai in a fetching black cat suit, and young cats Abbie and Dillon Paten.

An improbable 'Dame Edna' character, ably played by Cheryl Burke, complete with stuffed cat, caused mixed crowd reactions.

### And Basil came too!

Mingling with the crowd and perspiring freely in the 33-degree heat, was Basil the Bilby (alias Aboriginal artist Naomi Dann), escorted by CALM administrative officer, Debra Burke.

Behind them the giant bilby, carried on bamboo

poles, scuttled through the streets, pursued by a snarling and ferocious giant papier-mâché feral cat, also carried on bamboo poles!

Pedestrian transport for the giant bilby and feral cat required no less than a team of ten—all local CALM volunteers, apart from wildlife officer Warwick Roe and myself.

The feral cat was also successful in provoking several unscheduled incidents. One occurred when the cat attempted to pursue Broome jail inmates, who had been temporarily liberated for the duration of the parade.

A further debacle occurred when a dachshund bravely attempted to challenge the giant cat on the Town Oval, much to the amusement of a vast crowd! By this time a few of the 'cat bearers' were feeling a little sore in the shoulders from a long lifting effort.

The Shinju judges rewarded CALM's efforts with a pearl shell trophy for Best Overall Float. Staff were later overwhelmed by well-wishers wishing to be photographed with the feral tom cat.

