

Catching up with two more field officer graduates

THE following two 1996 field officer graduates to be revisited, exemplify the diversity of backgrounds that blend to make up the dynamic culture that is CALM, with its broad spectrum of invaluable knowledge and skills. The graduates are Paul Connolly and Natasha Oke.

Paul and Natasha have one thing in common—one that is often found among other graduates—and that is their passion for the natural environment and the satisfaction they draw from their work.

Paul Connolly's love for the outdoors manifested itself well before his employment with CALM.

"Having been brought up on a property bordering Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve, I developed a gargantuan thirst for the outdoors that has stayed with me," said Paul.

"This 'thirst' prompted me in 1993 to enrol in an Environmental Management Bachelor of Science degree course at Edith Cowan University's Jondalup Campus."

Paul seized every chance to broaden and strengthen his degree, by undertaking work experience with CALM whenever possible.

This included work as a Cape Range National Park ranger, and also as a research assistant on the

by Justine
Murphy

Jarrah Stand Improvement Project with CALM Dwellingup, while in his third year of university.

"These experiences with CALM gave me a solid foundation for a future career with the department, and led me to apply to take part in the field officer recruitment program," Paul said.

Paul is currently enjoying his role as a wildlife officer in CALM, and as a member of the Special Investigations Unit in the Wildlife Protection Branch at Como, he has become something of a detective.

Targeting 'baddies'

"Duties in this unit include investigations into some of the more high-profile wildlife 'baddies', including wildlife traffickers", said Paul.

"This has meant working closely with a number of external enforcement agencies, including WA Police Service, Australian Customs Service and various interstate wildlife agencies."

Paul's other responsibilities include the monitoring of the Whale Watch Industry off Perth Waters, and the Whale Shark Reef near Exmouth.

As for his most memorable CALM experience,

Paul said, "My involvement in the Montebello Renewal project as part of *Western Shield* was a highlight of my introduction into CALM, and likely to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that won't easily be forgotten."

Natasha Oke, takes us to Manjimup, where she is currently employed as a dieback interpreter with the Forest Management Branch.

Natasha has been fortunate in having spread her wings and experienced a range of lifestyles from an early age.

Born in Melbourne, she has lived in country Victoria, Papua New Guinea, Canberra and NSW, before moving to WA.

In 1995, Natasha successfully completed a Bachelor of Science—Resource and Environmental Management degree at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra.

On completion of her degree, Natasha began work as a seasonal fire fighter in CALM's Mundaring District for approximately five months, finding the experience invaluable as well as memorable.

It was while working in Mundaring that she was accepted into the Field Officer recruitment program.

Dieback interpretation

In September 1996, Natasha began work as a dieback interpreter in



Overseer Brian Smith, left, supervises budding CALM firefighters Paul Connolly and Natasha Oke, as they grapple to control the 'marauder nozzle', during their Fire Management Course at Dwellingup.

Photo by Alan Byrne

Manjimup, where a significant proportion of her time is spent in the forest looking for, and mapping, the presence of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* before logging operations begin.

Rare Flora and other surveys that involve her in looking for the Armillaria fungus in karri regrowth, are among Natasha's other duties.

The chance to see areas of the forest that are not readily accessible by everyone, is what she enjoys most in her job.

"I must say, too, that the wildflower season in the South West is very impressive, and the chance to see a wide variety of native animals in the wild is something I'm not accustomed to elsewhere in Australia," Natasha said.

Snakes!

"The large number of snakes in the South West, for example, is quite an eye-opener," she said.

The success of the training program is obvious in both Paul and Natasha who, like those who have featured in *CALM NEWS* before them, have found that the

program provided a valuable avenue of contact between fellow field officers.

They also agreed that while some aspects of the program were not relevant to their present positions in the department, 'knowledge is never a burden'.

"After all, who knows what the future may require of us," they said.

