

Project Eden promises glimpse of paradise lost

by Carolyn Thomson

THE State Government last month announced a bold \$260 000 plan to make Shark Bay's Peron Peninsula a haven for rare native animals.

Environment Minister Kevin Minson said CALM's *Project Eden* aimed to remove virtually all feral cats, foxes and rabbits from a massive 1050 square kilometre area of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.

If the project is success-

ful Peron Peninsula could become the largest area in Australia in which large numbers of endangered animals roam freely.

"If it is successful it will be a conservation coup of international significance," Mr Minson said.

Peron Peninsula is joined to the mainland by an extremely narrow neck,

which means invasion of feral animals could be easily controlled through fencing and baiting.

CALM scientist Per Christensen will lead the project operations.

"CALM research has shown that feral foxes and cats have been responsible for the disappearance and decline of dozens of native animal species, including at least ten mammal species which were once found on Peron," Per said.

"They include endangered animals such as the banded hare-wallaby, western barred bandicoot, stick-nest rat and the Shark Bay mouse.

"The only natural wild populations of these species are restricted to a few offshore islands."

Because of its size, the Peninsula could support large and stable populations of each of these species, providing the Shark Bay World Heritage Area with

an added tourist attraction.

Other species that may be reintroduced include the chuditch, woylie, red-tailed phascogale, rufous hare-wallaby and mulgara.

Project Eden will be carried out in two phases.

The first phase - the reduction of feral animals on the peninsula - is expected to last two years and will demonstrate whether feral cats and foxes can be controlled on a large scale.

The second phase is the reintroduction, which will not be attempted unless foxes and feral cats can be reduced to near 2 per cent of their former density.

An initial reconnaissance based on the number of tracks has shown that Peron supports extremely high numbers of foxes (estimated to be as high as 1000) and rabbits.

CALM research scien-

tist Dave Algar has tested a range of bait mediums suitable for cats and developed a promising cat bait.

Project Eden will test his new bait in the field for the first time on a large scale.

"If it works it has the potential to have a huge positive impact elsewhere in Australia," Dave said.

Work on mammal reintroduction by CSIRO in Shark Bay has provided encouraging results.

The Useless Loop Community Biosphere Project Group and the CSIRO appear to have eradicated foxes and controlled feral cats on the nearby 8500 ha Heirisson Prong.

Although Peron Peninsula is a much bigger area, Heirisson Prong is an important model for *Project Eden*.

Burrowing bettongs and Shark Bay mice were

recently released on the Prong and monitoring has shown that they are doing well.

Project Eden is a major conservation project with the potential to establish Peron Peninsula as one of the natural wonders of the world.

It is a bold project but it has risks. For instance, if foxes and cats are easier to control than rabbits, the rabbit population could actually increase.

Project Eden would also have spin-offs for the community, providing a significant boost to the emerging ecotourism industry in Shark Bay.

Per Christensen will lead a team of experienced CALM scientists and operations staff, that includes Keith Morris, Neil Burrows, Ron Shepherd and Roger Armstrong.



From left, Ray Smith, Dr Per Christensen and Alex Robinson release a fox fitted with a radio tracking collar.
Photo by Richard Polden courtesy Sunday Times

Thank you from CALM

The Department of Conservation and Land Management extends its appreciation and thanks to the many people and organisations who helped fight the recent fire in the Gngangara pine plantation. Their co-operation and unrelenting efforts over many hard hours prevented a major disaster.

They included the following: City of Wanneroo Volunteer Bush Fire Bri-

gades, City of Wanneroo Rangers, Shire of Swan Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, Shire of Swan Rangers, Bush Fires Board, WA Fire Brigade, State Emergency Service, WA Police, St John Ambulance, Royal Australian Air Force, Salvation Army, SECWA, WAWA, NK Contracting, Ertech Contracting, Urban Fire Services Contracting, Softwood

Logging Services, Helicopters Australia, Brockways Tankers, BGC Contracting, Mucueha Grading, Swan Taxis, Wanneroo Villa Tavern, Chicken Treat Wanneroo, noalimba, and CALM crews from Perth, mundaring, Jarrahdale, Dwellingup, mornington, Blackwood, Manjimup, Pemberton, CALM Fire, Swan Region and Woodvale Research Centre.



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