

ENDANGERED!

by Dr. Andrew Burbidge



Bert & Babs Wells

GOLDEN BANDICOOT

Isoodon auratus

The Golden Bandicoot once occurred throughout the northern half of W.A., the whole of the Northern Territory, the northern part of South Australia, and possibly parts of Queensland and New South Wales. It has disappeared from almost all of its mainland range, and exists only in near-coastal areas of the north Kimberley from the Yampi Peninsula north to Prince Regent Nature Reserve.

Fortunately, it also occurs on three Western Australian islands - Barrow and Middle Islands (Pilbara) and Augustus Island (Kimberley). Black Rats (*Rattus rattus*) have become established on Middle Island leading to concern about the long-term viability of the population there.

The Golden Bandicoot once occurred on Hermite Island, in the Monte Bellos, but the introduction of cats led to its extinction well before the islands were used for the

testing of nuclear weapons in the 1950s.

Golden Bandicoots once lived in a wide variety of habitats, including sandplains, dunefields, and stony country. They sheltered in a grass-lined nest in a shallow scrape, usually under a spinifex hummock or amongst tussock grass. They are very well-known to Aborigines, and were an important Aboriginal food item. I have spoken to Pintupi Aborigines from the Gibson and Great Sandy Deserts who remember eating Golden Bandicoots as recently as 15 to 20 years ago (see 'Vanishing Desert Dwellers', *Landscape*, Winter 1987).

Very little is known about the biology or ecology of Golden Bandicoots and studying them in the wild would be very difficult because of the remote, rugged areas that they now inhabit. A practical alternative is to observe captive animals and compare them with the closely-related and better-studied

Brown Bandicoot (or Quenda) of the South-west.

The first step towards study of the mainland form of the Golden Bandicoot was taken recently. During the recent CALM rainforest survey three animals, two females and a male, were caught. After capture the animals travelled to the base camp at Mt Hart Station by helicopter, then by light aircraft to Derby and then by jet to Alice Springs via Darwin. At last report they were doing well. Alice Springs was chosen as the site for captive breeding because it is within the former distribution of the species, and the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory is a partner with CALM in the project.

If we can get the Golden Bandicoot to breed successfully, additional animals will need to be captured from the wild so that inbreeding is prevented. In the long term, plans are being developed to re-establish Golden Bandicoots.



LANDSCOPE

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In W.A. the concept of marine conservation reserves was firmly established in 1984 when the CALM Act was passed, with provision for Marine Parks and Marine Nature Reserves, vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority.

Since 1984 two major Marine Parks have been declared in W.A.: Marmion and Ningaloo.

This is a new field in W.A., and there are no local precedents to guide us in resolving the many management issues which have emerged.

A first consideration has been that fishing is already controlled under the Fisheries Act. It would be foolish for CALM to attempt to establish itself as a fisheries management agency. A policy decision has been made that any fisheries in Marine Parks will be regulated under the Fisheries Act.

A more philosophical problem has been that many citizens, although generally sympathetic to the conservation cause, are unaccustomed to the idea of having parks and reserves in the sea. The idea that the sea is a public common where anything and everything goes is still well entrenched in public attitudes. Yet there are many terrible examples around the world where coastal environments and their resources have been devastated by excessive and improper use. In W.A. we have not reached that point.

W.A. can be proud of its fisheries management record, based on the principle of sustainable use for posterity. Development of a marine parks and reserves system along our coast is another essential part of the overall objective. It is to be hoped, then, that our first initiatives in this direction will receive public support.

PINES



*How can less than four per cent of the State's area supply us with all our timber needs, and save the hardwood forests at the same time?
Details on page 28.*

WALL OF MOUTHS



It's a fish-eat-coral world, but what do the coral eat? Find out on page 32.



BORERS

Now you can be sure there are no borers in the door. Well, if they are there, at least you'll know what to call them after reading the article on page 42.

TROUBLED WATERS



Does the very word pollution make you feel powerless? Discover what you can do to help the wildlife victims on page 20.

FOREST RENEWAL



What is the connection between the poets' of the First World War and W.A.'s forests? Find out on page 56.



JEWEL OF THE KIMBERLEY

What do you mean frog? In my home I am a prince. After all, Prince Regent is the only mainland reserve where all of the original animal species remain. Meet the rest of them on page 47.

HILLS' BELLES



When Perth looks out its backdoor in spring the Hills are ablaze with colour. Your field guide to some of our glorious wildflowers starts on page 4.

ATTENTION ADULTS!

Sick of taking the anklebiters to the same old national parks and camping spots? Put them to work for you. If they enter the kids' competition on page 63 they could win two beautiful books on all the best picnic and camping spots between Perth and Eucla.

GATHER NO MOSS



The trouble with lichen is that up until recently it wasn't protected flora. Now lichen and their relatives - mosses, liverworts and algae - have joined the rest of the State's flora. See page 54.

RIGHT ON TRACK



Is a high-tech wilderness trek a contradiction in terms? Find out how 4WDs and conservation can co-exist peacefully on page 12.

Cover Photo



Magpie Geese take off from the Ord River.

Photo: Richard Woldendorp.

CONTENTS

	Page
Hills' Belles <i>by John Marshall and Brian Tullis</i>	4
Right on Track <i>by Kylie Byfield</i>	12
Bush Telegraph	19
Troubled Waters <i>by Liana Christensen</i>	20
Urban Antics: Marron Glace <i>by Andrew Cribb</i>	27
Pines - The Soft Option <i>by Don Spriggins</i>	28
Wall of Mouths <i>by Barry Wilson</i>	32
Book Review: <i>Wild Places, Quiet Places</i>	40
More Boring Insects <i>by Ian Abbott</i>	42
Prince Regent: Jewel of the Kimberley <i>by Andrew Burbidge, Chris Done and Barry Wilson</i>	47
Gather No Moss <i>by David Coates</i>	54
Rebuilding the Cathedral <i>by Roger Underwood</i>	56
Endangered: Golden Bandicoot <i>by Andrew Burbidge</i>	61
Letters	62

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