

Crocodile slips into Pilbara Port

People could be forgiven for being a little sceptical about a report of a three-metre estuarine or saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) being seen at Port Hedland in July 1987.

After all, saltwater crocodiles, which grow up to seven or eight metres in length, are not normally found south of Broome. They need the warm Kimberley conditions to survive. Breeding in freshwater swamps adjacent to rivers and tributaries is triggered by the regular Kimberley summer rainfall.

Although anecdotes suggest that saltwater crocodiles may have once existed in small numbers in the Pilbara, there is no firm evidence of this.

Port Hedland is over 500 km from Broome as the crocodile swims. The vast open spaces of the Eighty Mile Beach (which is actually 200 km long), and the limited amount of mangroves, discourages southern egress by saltwater crocodiles.

However, the species is renowned for its occasional long distance movements. Perhaps the Port Hedland crocodile was a straggler which found the tidal creeks around the Pilbara town suitable for survival. Another theory was that it could have been dumped.

The two men who reported the crocodile to the Police were taken seriously, as both had had experience of crocodiles in the wild, and the Minister for Conservation and Land Management issued a crocodile warning to residents and tourists in the area.

The harbour, the tidal creeks between Redbank and Finucane Island, and the mouth of the Turner River are popular for swimming, skiing, boating, fishing and crabbing. These locations have substantial mangrove areas, but CALM's initial investigations failed to find any sign of a crocodile.

Some weeks later, after searching by boat and checking the creek banks from the shore, Wildlife Officers Kevin Marshall and Mike Osborn spotted a typical crocodile mud slide. It indicated that the animal was from 2.4 to 3 metres long; large enough to pose a threat to the public. A bag of fish, set as a lure, had also been attacked.

A crocodile trap was hastily sent from Broome and set in Stingray Creek. Other traps were built and set in strategic locations.

For weeks, aerial, boat and foot patrols were conducted at low tide to monitor the traps. Night patrols were also made by boat, using a spotlight to check the mangroves for the elusive crocodile. More warnings were issued, as CALM was afraid that people would become complacent.

A year later, the crocodile was still at large. Pilbara Wildlife Officer Allan Shields continued helicopter and boat patrols without success. It seemed likely that the crocodile roamed a large area.



Peter Trembath

The door's open but nobody's home. When will Port Hedland's problem crocodile take the bait? (above).

In October 1988, it was spotted near Finucane Island and the following month a sixth sighting was made near the De Grey River, some distance from Port Hedland.

Operations Officer Wally Edgecombe led an expedition from Karratha to Port Hedland to search the waterways by vehicle, boat, helicopter and foot, but the crocodile again proved elusive.

Warnings have been repeated and the Port Hedland people asked to report any sightings. They have been advised to take care in crocodile areas.

This situation shows that it is not always possible to resolve a wildlife problem. We must respect the Australian environment in all its facets and, in many cases, learn to live with it.

Unusual events such as the arrival of the Port Hedland crocodile may occur from time to time. A crocodile was recently spotted by a helicopter pilot servicing an oil platform off the Onslow coast. It could be the Port Hedland crocodile or another straggler which has moved south.

David Mell

◆ BOOK REVIEW ◆

For years, W.A. has been under attack. Foreign armies relentlessly invade our shores and infiltrate our agricultural regions, wreaking havoc as they go. And, despite being unarmed, they have proven to be formidable opponents.

This 'enemy' is foreign insect species and the ongoing battle to control them is the focus of a new book by former Government entomologist Clee Jenkins.

In *'The Wanderings of an Entomologist'*, Mr Jenkins outlines the history of agricultural entomology in W.A. and takes a look at the many pests which came into the State as a result of poor quarantine controls. He also discusses the need for strict controls in the future to keep out pests which could become a serious threat.

The final chapter is devoted to Mr Jenkins' recollections of his wanderings as an entomologist.

The book sells for \$10.35 at the University of W.A. bookshop.

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EDITORIAL

A prerequisite for the successful management of land and wildlife is an understanding of the processes that drive ecosystems, and managers who can manipulate these processes.

In Western Australia, we are fortunate that we have a wealth of talent in different government agencies, tertiary institutions and private companies who can provide these research and management skills.

Of course, obtaining a perfect understanding of ecosystems and ways to manage them brings to mind the frog who wants to reach a creek, but can only jump half the distance every time.

But it is not the complexities of understanding or managing ecosystems which provide the greatest difficulty.

Social and political factors are far more difficult to accommodate.

All the scientific and managerial skills in the world are worth nothing if the community and, often more importantly, selected constituencies within the community do not support the management strategies.

Unfortunately, there is often an inverse relationship between a scientist's or manager's skills in his profession and his capacity to handle social and political factors in the community. This is not surprising, since most scientists and managers have received little training in basic communication skills, let alone community politics.

CALM is attempting to address this problem in a variety of ways. But the people who should know the most about how to obtain community support for public land management strategies are the public. *Landscape* readers are an important and influential constituency. If you have thoughts on this issue we would like to hear from you.



What a sterling idea! A new management plan for CALM's South Coast Region - page 28.



Are insects gradually eating away our jarrah forests? Turn to page 18.



What lies beneath the waters of Marmion Marine Park? See page 25.

COVER




A rose by any other name... Does its name detract from the beauty of the common eggfly (Hypolimnas bolina)? Photograph - Jiri Lochman

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