

# ENDANGERED!

by Andrew Burbidge



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## LESSER NODDY *Anous tenuirostris*

While not threatened with extinction at present, the Lesser Noddy is a vulnerable species because of its low numbers and few breeding places. A major oil spill or the death of the mangroves on its breeding islands could spell disaster.

Noddies are a group of dark-coloured terns. Two species occur in Western Australia - the Common Noddy and the Lesser Noddy. While the former is widespread in tropical and sub-tropical parts of the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the Lesser Noddy is found only near the Houtman Abrolhos, off Geraldton, and the Seychelle Islands in the western Indian Ocean north of Madagascar. These two populations do not mix and are thought to be separate subspecies.

In the Abrolhos there are only two breeding places - on Pelsaert Island in Southern Group, and on the adjacent Wooded and Morley Islands in Easter Group.

Lesser Noddies are one of a small minority of sea-birds that nest in trees. They nest colonially, building large nests of seaweed on horizontal branches of white mangroves, the only suitable tree in the Abrolhos. A single egg is produced. Egg-laying commences in August and continues for some months, with the last of the young flying by March. The adults eat small fish, their main fishing grounds being west of the islands. They do not migrate, remaining near the Abrolhos all year. Winter gales may sometimes drive birds ashore as far south as Busselton.

A count of the Pelsaert noddies by CALM research staff in 1986 showed that there were about 30 000 nests in use in seven separate colonies. W.A. Museum staff counted nests on Wooded and Morley Islands in August 1977 and found about 8 500 and 2 500 nests respectively. The total population of the Lesser Noddy in Australia is probably around 100 000.

Over the years the size of the population appears to have fluctuated widely. Two large colonies existed on Pelsaert from 1840 to 1899, but by 1907 these had been abandoned, apparently because of disturbance from guano mining. The birds re-established on Pelsaert sometime between 1913 and 1936 and numbers have varied since then.

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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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