

The spinifex hopping-mouse is found in the arid interior of Australia.

Slightly larger than the introduced mouse, it is well adapted to the desert. It will drink water if available, but if necessary it can live entirely upon a diet of dry seeds.

It avoids day-time heat by sheltering in a cool burrow, an elaborate network of tunnels and chambers, almost a metre below ground.

Photographer Michael Morcombe excavated a burrow in sand-dune country in the North-West of WA. Trails of tiny footprints led to a small round hole, a vertical shaft almost a metre deep, where a plug of soft soil blocked the tunnel during the day.

Along the main horizontal tunnel was a chamber, with a grass nest containing newborn hopping-mice. Other tunnels led to escape shafts, hidden by clumps of spinifex.

Hopping-mice have a two-footed leaping action and look rather like miniature kangaroos. Above the ground they are extremely fast, leaping high and erratically.

One of their predators, the desert death-adder, sometimes

## THE SPINIFEX HOPPING-MOUSE



lies close to the burrow entrance, waiting for a mouse to emerge. This snake's patterned body makes it extremely difficult to see against the green and gold spinifex and red sand.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
MICHAEL MORCOMBE



## TURNING THE TIDE

Seaweek (March 25 to April 1) is to oceans what Arbor Day is to trees. The week of activities should remind our predominantly coastal-based populations about the wonders of the oceans and the need to look after them.

Seaweek will aim to raise our awareness of the need to care for and understand the ocean ecosystems.

The theme of Seaweek 1990 is to 'turn the tide'. Activities will target issues such as marine conservation, recreation and pollution, sustainable use of the oceans and boating safety.

On March 25 there will be a marine open day at Hillary's

Boat Harbour, featuring the Cousteau Society's research vessel *Alcyone*, free snorkelling courses, guided tours of CALM's Boyinaboat Dive Trail, displays, tours of Underwater World and much more. The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) will have a display. With Marmion and Ningaloo Marine Parks, and several more ocean and estuarine parks soon to come

under its control, CALM has a great interest in and responsibility for the marine environment.

Many other Seaweek activities, including a week of special events at Atlantis Marine Park, have been planned by the Marine Education Society of Australasia.



# LANDSCOPE

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Rock-wallabies threw down the gauntlet to scientists trying to trap them for research. Who ended up winning the catch-me-if-you-can contest? See page 35.



Scientists will use modern technology to restore two rare and endangered mammals to an area in the Gibson Desert from which they have become extinct. See page 10.



Shells, tiny crabs and sundry other creatures are sure to please the curious naturalist who invades the intertidal zone at low tide. Explore the place where the shore meets the sea on page 23.



Waterbirds flock to the Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands in their tens of thousands, some travelling over 10 000 kilometres from summer breedings grounds in northern China and Siberia. Turn to page 17.



It's the burning question! Is prescribed burning in spring or autumn better for the jarrah forest? Or is there another alternative? See page 28.

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## COVER

The designs of desert artist Benny Tjapaltjarri show events associated with the Pakuru or golden bandicoot dreaming in the Gibson Desert. The three central roundels depict rockholes and the others represent hills. The background dots show the vegetation of the area.



Managing Editor: Ron Kawallak  
 Editor: Carolyn Thomson  
 Designers: Louise Burch/Robyn Mundy  
 Production: Karen Addison  
 Advertising: Tim Langford-Smith ☎ (09) 389 8644 Fax: (09) 389 8296  
 Illustrations: 'Swamped With Birds' - Ian Dickinson  
 'Seasoned With Fire' - Yeon Hee Kim  
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