FUR SEALS' ORDEAL

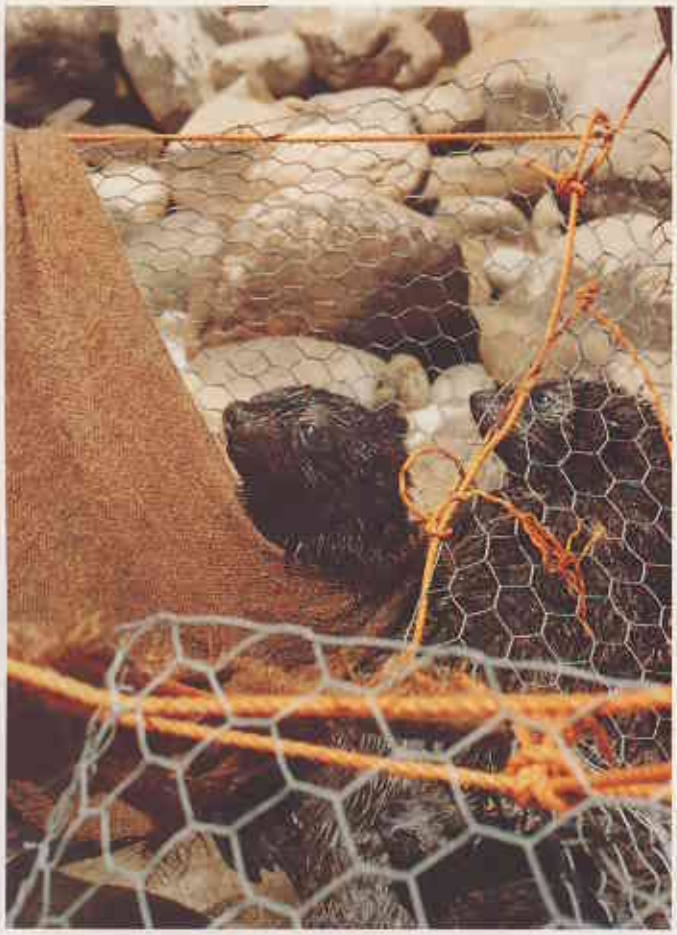
Just how do you catch and clean wild, wriggling, snarling, snapping, oil-coated seal pups on a slippery granite rock island in the middle of nowhere?

That was the dilemma facing Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) rescuers on two remote island nature reserves off Esperance earlier this year when a bulk carrier ran aground spilling tonnes of bunker oil into the ocean.

The New Zealand fur seal pups had been playing in tidal pools away from their mothers, who were in nearby waters fishing. The oil surged in, leaving them black and tarred.

CALM officers and volunteers had to crawl into tight rock crevices and be lowered into tidal pools upside-down (being wary to avoid incoming waves!) to catch the pups by the tail and behind the head (to avoid those teeth!) and to pen them before the clean-up.

Before their release, cleaned seal pups were treated and their eyes coated with protective ointment. Photo - Brenton Siggs



Tarred babies: pens were set up on both affected islands to contain the pups before they could be cleaned. Photo - Brenton Siggs

Teams of cleaners washed the seals, using brushes and biodegradable detergents (two washes), followed by a spray with Preen - a stain remover for clothes. The pups were rinsed and put back in the pen for treatment by a veterinarian before being released.

At the same time, their habitat had to be cleaned. Rescuers used high pressure hoses to wash the oil off the rocks and into the surging waves where it was naturally dispersed.

It took eight days from the time the oiled seal colonies were found to when the last equipment and people were airlifted off the islands by helicopter, leaving the seals undisturbed (for a week).

Most of those who had worked on the islands to clean seals received bites and had to make a trip to the local doctor for an anti-tetanus shot.

Research data collected from the two NZ fur seal pup colonies affected by the oil spill will contribute to a benchmark study and add to information previously collected on the species.

Several visits have been made to the two islands since the pups were released, although researchers have been careful not to disrupt the bonding process between mother and pup.

CALM's consultant veterinarian Nick Gales believes the subsequent documented growth rate and health of the surviving pups is an encouraging sign.

Of the 38 seal pups affected on Hood Island, Dr Gales has put mortality of the two-week to two-month-old pups at between four animals (10.5 per cent of initial pup population) and 12 animals (31 per cent of initial pup population).

Blood samples taken from the animals during the monitoring visits have been sent to scientists who worked on the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska for special analysis on hydrocarbon levels.

Dr Gales is now preparing a detailed report and a scientific publication on the fur seals' ordeal.

WOOD FESTIVAL AT CURTIN

A festival to promote scientific and artistic dialogue on the subject of wood will be staged at Curtin University of Technology in Perth from September 20-28, 1991.

Organised by Curtin and CALM, the festival, to be called *Woodworks*, will include scientific and technical exhibitions and workshops plus a series of arts-related competitions, exhibitions and other events.

A major event during *Woodworks* will be a CALM-organised symposium, "Trees and Timber - Technologies for the 21st Century".

The purpose of the festival is to demonstrate that wood and trees play an important role in both the technical and artistic aspects of our lives.

The eminent Australian furniture designer Helmut Leuchkenhausen, playwright Tony Nichols and poet/novelist Thomas Shapcott are three of the major figures in the arts who will be participating in the festival.

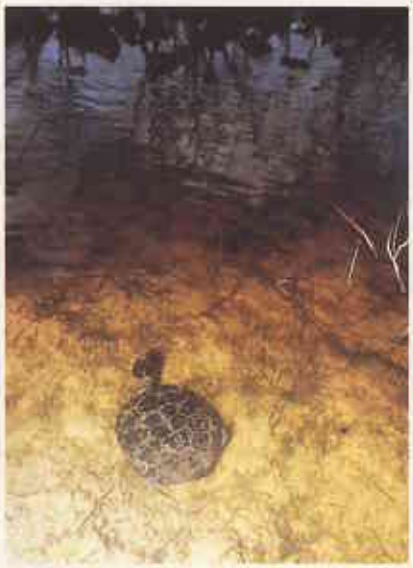
LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SIX NO. 4 - WINTER EDITION 1991

Cloud-capped Bluff Knoll, majestically brooding sentinel of the Stirling Range. Does it hold a secret in its stony heart - perhaps the answer to the missing mammal mystery? See story on page 9.

Mulga and fire - at best an uneasy relationship - sometimes symbiotic, sometimes disastrous. Find out when and where on page 20.

The Kimberley's rugged grandeur is deceptively fragile. Additional reserves managed by CALM help protect the region's delicate, complex and diverse ecosystems. See page 35.



A western swamp tortoise (Pseudemydura umbrina). *Could this be one of the last to be photographed? Not if CALM's ten-year recovery plan succeeds. See page 28 for details.*

An uncommon dragon, Caimaniops amphiboluriodes *inhabits mulga shrubs. Many other dragon lizards prefer harsher habitats such as rock-piles and salt lake beds. See page 51.*

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

Central netted dragon (Ctenophorus inermis), *one of the more than 60 species of dragon lizard that inhabit the arid and semi-arid parts of Australia. The acute eyesight and swiftness of dragon lizards are essential in order to avoid predators and to capture food. See page 51.*

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