



STREET SMART TOURING MAP
Blackwood Valley
 Bridgetown, Nannup, Donnybrook, Greenbushes, Boyup Brook
 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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DESERT DREAMING

A WA oil company, West Australian Petroleum (WAPET), will sponsor an ambitious project to reintroduce mammals extinct on most of the Australian mainland.

The three-year *Desert Dreaming* experimental project will investigate the dramatic decline in desert mammals by reintroducing endangered boodies (burrowing bettongs) and golden bandicoots to the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve. Without WAPET's support the project would not be viable, because of the cost of working in such an isolated area.

Scientists from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) plan to release up to 40 of each species in the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve in May next year. CALM researcher Per Christensen said the study would help to determine why 15 mammal species have declined significantly or become extinct in Australia's deserts, and help CALM to control feral animals in remote desert reserves.

"Over 90 per cent of mammal species with an adult body weight between 35 and 5500 grams have disappeared from Australia's arid zone in the last three decades - over a third of all the original mammal species of the desert," Per Christensen said.

"The fact that so many mammals have disappeared from our deserts is a conservation tragedy of

enormous dimensions."

The boodies and bandicoots will be taken from healthy populations on Barrow Island, from which WAPET has been extracting petroleum products in an environmentally sensitive manner for many years, and airlifted to the Desert.

The released animals will be placed in fenced compounds and supplemented for about two weeks, to give them time to adapt to their new environment. When they appear to be acclimatised, holes will be made in the fences to allow them to disperse and they will be fitted with radio collars and tracked almost continuously. Radio-tracking will provide valuable information about their behaviour and their ability to adapt to and breed in their new environment.

It is thought that the mammals disappeared from Australia's deserts because of fox and cat predation, changed burning patterns after Aboriginals left the land and competition from feral herbivores such as rabbits.

Before the animals are reintroduced, CALM will remove feral animals from the release area by baiting and complete patch burning to provide a choice of habitat for the mammals.

The tracking of the animals will help to determine whether the mammals favour burnt or unburnt habitat.

CALM scientists visited the Gibson Desert in August and September to continue preparation work for the release. Pit traps have been placed in the bait area and a control area to determine the impact that baiting feral animals will have on local mammals and reptiles.

The Gibson Desert Nature Reserve, where endangered species will be reintroduced next year.

Photo - Ray Smith

The wongai ningau, one of the small mammals that still persist in the desert.

Photo - Ray Smith

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SEVEN NO. 1 SPRING EDITION 1991



A wave of colour is spreading from Shark Bay to Jurien and inland to Meekatharra. Our story on page 10 takes you into Wildflower Country.



The WA Museum is 100 years old. It houses a staggering four million specimens of insects, marine animals, fish, birds, reptiles and frogs. Page 22.



Seven species of microscopic dieback-disease fungi are attacking WA's unique wildflowers. See page 28.



The rugged Pilbara landscape has some hidden delights. On page 16, go up hill to Hamersley Range, then down Dales and other spectacular gorges.



How does WA's conservation heritage look to the people who look after it? Turn to page 26 for some great photographs from a recent competition run for CALM staff.

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COVER

Out now! Wildflowers are blooming in the vast tracts of country north of Perth, especially in the northern sandplains and Murchison, which is experiencing a bumper wildflower season following heavy winter rains. Philippa Nikulinsky's illustration shows some of the wildflowers for which WA is justly famous: the splendid everlasting, buttercup, red leschenaultia, Sturt's desert pea, catspaw, wattle, native wisteria, black kangaroo paw, flame pea, and scaevola - all covered in the newly released book Wildflower Country. See page 10.



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