



ENDANGERED!



In many areas fringing Perth, bandicoots are the last remaining native mammal except for bats. It is common to see them late in the afternoon - pointy-nosed, grey-brown mammals the size of a rabbit - feeding in open land or scurrying into nearby dense vegetation.

This is the southern brown bandicoot (*Isoodon obesulus*) known locally by the Nyungah name quenda. It also occurs in South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and on the eastern seaboard, where it is called the short-nosed bandicoot to avoid confusion with *Perameles nasuta*, an eastern bandicoot with an even longer nose.

Quendas inhabit dense vegetation around wetlands on the coastal plain, and along water-courses in the Darling Range and southern forests. They feed on adult and larval insects as well as earthworms and tubers, making small conical excavations while foraging. Most feeding is done within easy reach of cover.

Quenda young are born between July and April. The gestation period is less than 15 days, and a single female can produce as many as three litters in one season. Litter size varies from one to six, but only large females can successfully rear more than two young at once. The juveniles are weaned at 50-60 days, when they leave their mother's home range to search for suitable available habitat.

Individuals in low-density populations are territorial, but where quendas live at high density, considerable overlap in home range occurs, with individuals apparently avoiding each other. Large males increase their area of movement during the extended breeding season, and subordinate males appear to move less widely.

Quendas were once quite widespread in the south-west. They still occur in the jarrah and karri forests, and as recently as 1971 there were populations at Dryandra Forest near Narrogin and at Tutanning Nature Reserve east of Pingelly. The most

inland records were at Wyalcatchem in 1963 and Hyden in 1965. Today there are none in drier inland locations: quendas are restricted to south-west forests and to their prime habitat, the coastal margin from Yanchep to Cape Le Grand.

Unfortunately, their preference for low-lying coastal areas brings them into conflict with humans, as land development spreads along that strip and into semi-rural land around the urban areas.

Quendas are remarkably resilient to change in their environment. By living in thick vegetation, and reproducing at such a high rate, they cope with predation by cats and foxes better than many other native animals.

Each year, however, more and more of the quenda's prime real estate is disappearing, or coming under pressure from nearby residential developments that bring cats, dogs and bushland degradation.

Unless substantial areas of good habitat on the coastal plain are reserved and managed, the quenda may be lost from that part of its range. If habitat loss continues, it might eventually join those less resilient Western Australian marsupials that survive only in small remnant populations.

Photos - Jiri Lochman

TONY FRIEND

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.

FEATURES

WILDFLOWER COUNTRY
CAROLYN THOMSON, STEVE HOPPER, GREG KEIGHERY AND PENNY HUSSEY 10

UP HILL, DOWN DALES
ALAN PADGETT, STEPHAN FRITZ 16

COLLECTIONS OF A CENTURY
PATRICK BERRY 22

THROUGH CALM EYES 26

WILDFLOWER KILLERS
BRYAN SHEARER, RAY WILSON AND MIKE STUKELY 28

OF MISTS AND MOUNTAINS
JOHN WATSON 35

SPACE INVADERS OF A WEEDY KIND!
PENNY HUSSEY 39

PARADISE ON THE EDGE
TONY FRIEND 45

DRAWING THE LINE
ROBERT POWELL 49

REGULARS

IN PERSPECTIVE 4

BUSH TELEGRAPH 5

ENDANGERED QUENDA 15

URBAN ANTICS 54

SPECIALS

PHOTO COMPETITION 9

KIDS AND TREES
ARBOR DAY POSTER COMPETITION 52

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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Colour Separation by Prepress Services
Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print

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Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director
Department of Conservation and Land Management,
50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia 6152.