

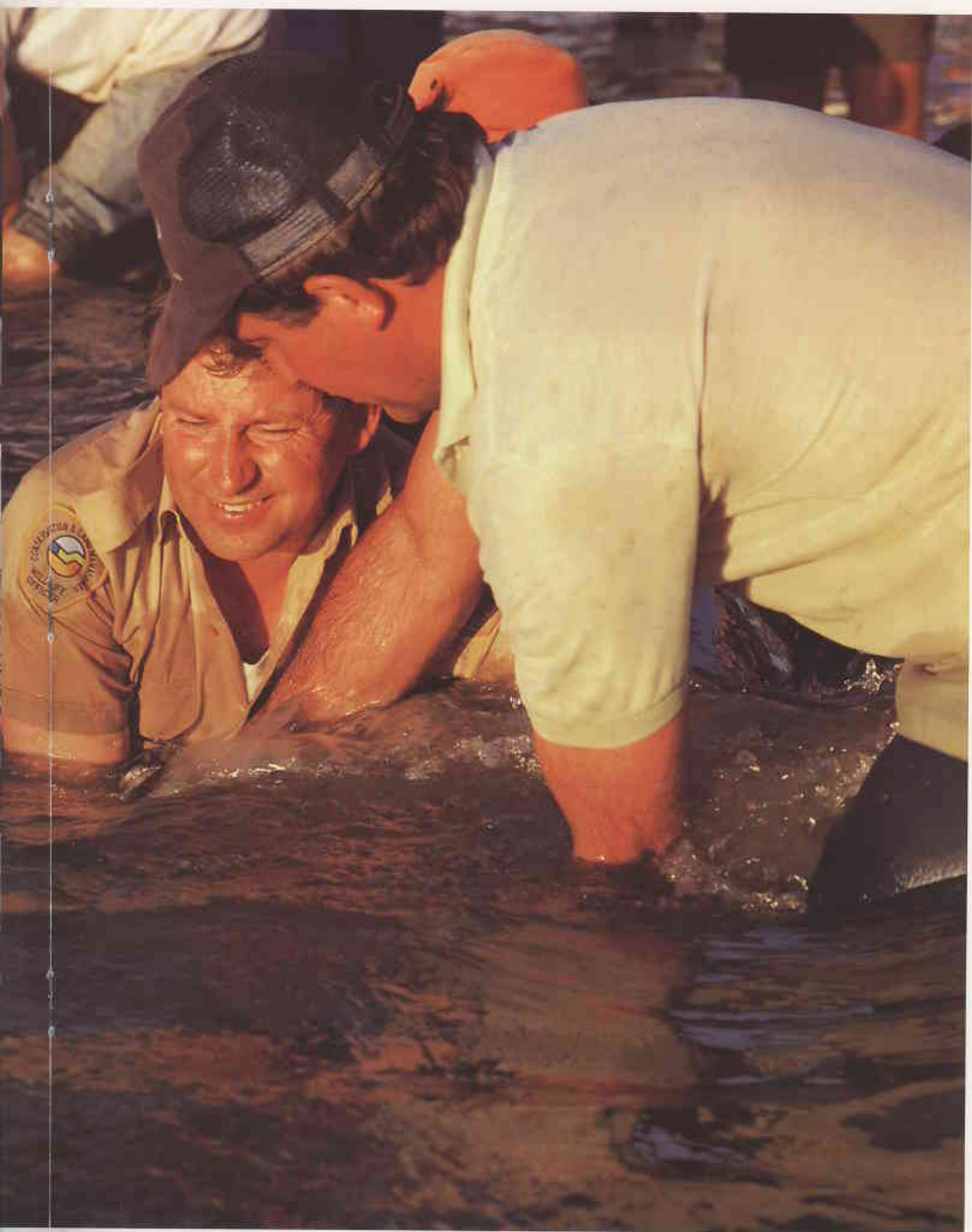


VOLUNTEERS FOR NATURE

In a time when many people are talking about conservation, there are nearly a thousand Western Australians who are actively helping to preserve and protect our natural environment. Colin Ingram looks at what motivates this dedicated volunteer force.

by Colin Ingram





The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) boasts a silent workforce of nearly 1 000 volunteers, without whose assistance many tasks would just not get done. Hundreds of individuals as well as many groups and organisations contribute an enormous pool of skills, knowledge and energy to a wide range of CALM activities right across Western Australia.

What type of person becomes a volunteer? While there is no such thing as the typical volunteer, there are many common interests and motivations. Volunteers come from all walks of life; almost half are in full-time employment; most are between the ages of 35 and 45.

CALM and its predecessors have always been aided by volunteers in some form or other. In 1989, CALM formalised its volunteer program and appointed a full-time coordinator. Since that time more than 150 projects involving volunteers have been established.

Perhaps the best-known groups of volunteers, which have also had a long association with CALM and its predecessors, are the Volunteer Bushfire Brigades. Without their dedication to fire prevention and suppression, firefighting authorities would have the impossible task of managing fire on their own.

Western Australia has more than 800 bushfire brigades comprising some 30 000 volunteer bushfire fighters. Like CALM's volunteers, these people come from all walks of life. Most of them are motivated by the need to protect personal and community assets. For others it is an escape from routine work in cities and towns, and a chance to enjoy the excitement of working with others in sometimes dangerous circumstances. It is this selfless comradeship, developed through group pursuits and forged through common interest, that attracts many volunteers to join the 'silent workforce'.

SEA RESCUERS

Like volunteer bushfire fighters, volunteer marine mammal rescue groups are autonomous groups with their own internal organisations. Whale rescue groups assist CALM whenever called upon. In most instances the rescue groups are locally based and are

frequently first on the scene of a whale or dolphin stranding. They are often required to coordinate activities until CALM officers arrive to oversee operations.

Typical of almost all volunteers, these groups are enormously dedicated. Endless sacrifices are made to help save stranded animals. This might involve volunteers spending long hours in freezing water pouring buckets full of seawater over whales to keep them moist. They might use their own bodies to protect the whales from wave action, allowing them to gain enough strength to attempt an organised return to deeper waters. As a result of such experiences, the bond created between volunteer and animal is often lifelong

and inexplicable.

In July 1986, at Augusta, some 200 active volunteers played an essential role in returning 96 of 114 stranded false killer whales to the sea. In September 1988, a similar number of people actively assisted in returning 32 of 84 false killer whales to safety. In both incidents, a cross-section of volunteers formed an integral part of the operation. Less publicised, but equally important, were those volunteers and volunteer organisations that provided essential support and back-up for the 'up front' volunteers. Food and drinks, first aid, blankets, lighting, and providers of equipment and housing are all essential contributors to a successful and effective outcome.

Previous pages
Main: Volunteers and CALM officers at a dolphin stranding.
 Photo - Robert Garvey

Left: A Gibson Desert marsupial.
 Photo - Barbara Madden

Insets
Top: Interpreting the seashore.
 Photo - Rod Annear

Centre: Regravelling a park track.
 Photo - Terry Passmore

Bottom: Weighing small mammals on a LANDSCOPE expedition.
 Photo - Barbara Madden

Right: Volunteer firefighters in action.
 Photo - Evan Collis

Volunteers pouring water over stranded false killer whales.
 Photo - Jiri Lochman



Other emergencies have evoked similar responses from local communities and concerned people. When the *Sanko Harvest* hit a reef near Esperance in early 1991, hundreds of volunteers immediately sprang into action. Coordinated by local CALM staff, volunteers were crucial to the success of the operation. De-oiling New Zealand fur seals on islands of the Archipelago of Recherche became a dangerous and difficult task. Selected volunteers were ferried by helicopter every morning for five days to help CALM staff clean the 180 oiled seal pups. Without this intervention it has been estimated that between 80 and 90 per cent of the pups would have perished. In other locations, eager volunteers assisted with the less glamorous, but important task of bagging and containing hundreds of tonnes of oiled sand.

While the overall operation had its inevitable share of problems, and there were many lessons learnt the hard way, the volunteer operation was declared an overwhelming success.

FLORA AND FAUNA SURVEYORS

In 1990, following a major wildfire in the Fitzgerald River National Park, more than 100 volunteers, from as far away as Perth, spent several enjoyable weekends helping CALM staff to reconstruct essential visitor facilities at several locations in the park. Bollards, walking tracks, steps, handrails and information shelters, which were destroyed by the fire, were replaced or repaired. This action made it possible for the park to be re-opened to visitors within three months of the fire. Another positive outcome following the fire was a flora survey, conducted by Dr Steve Hopper (formerly of CALM, now Director of Kings Park and Botanic Gardens) and a small group from the Western Australian Native Orchid Study and Conservation Group. They located 20 species of orchid and eight hybrids not previously recorded for the park.

Botanical pursuits is an area that attracts many people to volunteer for CALM. The Friends of the WA Herbarium is the largest 'ongoing' group of CALM volunteers. The group's major achievement has been the expansion of the public reference collection to more



Top: Reconstructing visitor facilities after wildfire in Fitzgerald River National Park.

Photo - Terry Passmore

Above: A volunteer identifying specimens from the Gibson Desert.

Photo - Barbara Madden



than 6 200 specimens. The work also involved the creation of a database linked to the main collection. Retired pharmacist Brian Best, formerly of Zimbabwe, has contributed countless hours identifying and cataloguing the bryophyte and liverwort collection. He has made a considerable contribution to our knowledge of this group of plants.

Roger Hilton, a retired mycologist from the Botany Department of the University of Western Australia, is

another specialist volunteer with responsibility for the Herbarium's fungi collection. A large number of macro-fungi now in the collection were donated by Roger. In 1990 Estelle Leyland, a farmer from Mullewa, packed her car and volunteered for a position 'anywhere up north' to record and document plants and animals. Estelle spent seven months completing a weed survey of Millstream-Chichester National Park, before moving to Broome and Kununurra for a further 12 months, where she collected biological data for use in park brochures and booklets. She is one of the volunteers who have received a special award for their outstanding voluntary contribution to nature conservation in this State.

While all individuals who assist CALM receive recognition for their efforts, many groups and individuals assist nature conservation in WA outside the formal structure of CALM's Community Involvement Program. This is especially

so in the fields of botany and ornithology, where groups such as the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU) and The Wildflower Society spend countless hours engrossed in their 'labours of love'. In many instances outstanding discoveries and tasks go virtually unrecognised.

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

The largest numbers of CALM volunteers fall into the category of education, information and interpretation providers. These people are dedicated to spreading the conservation message. Several autonomous groups have developed volunteer partnerships with CALM, which assist in achieving mutual objectives. The Friends of Marmion Marine Park is one such group that has a charter to assist, protect, preserve and enlighten people about Marmion Marine Park. The group regularly staffs the foyer of CALM's Hillarys Boat Harbour office on weekends to help the public get the most out of the park by providing information on things to do and see. In

their brightly coloured tee-shirts, 'friends' are regularly seen at boat ramps and popular fishing spots handing out brochures and talking to park visitors, boat users and fishers. Dedicated groups also exist at Penguin Island (Friends of Shoalwater Islands) and the Canning River Regional Park.

A recent extension to volunteer activities at Hillarys Boat Harbour has been the development of a joint volunteer project between Underwater World and CALM. Volunteers are now providing guided tours of the recently completed dolphin enclosure for Rajah, Mila and Echo, the three Atlantis dolphins that

chose the safety of a marina rather than the freedom of permanent ocean life. The attraction of these three remaining dolphins and the incredible story of the return to the wild of six Atlantis dolphins, told by volunteers, has already enthralled thousands of visitors to Hillarys.

Campground hosts are another type of volunteer. They are usually retired couples who are well placed to travel to the State's national parks and forest recreation areas to camp in designated camping grounds. Here, the volunteers act as hosts to the many visitors that use the site, providing orientation and information about the local area, campground behaviour, facilities, and services. Campground hosts are important resources for CALM, providing regular reports to rangers by hand-held radio on the capacity of sites, firewood supply, and the behaviour of visitors.

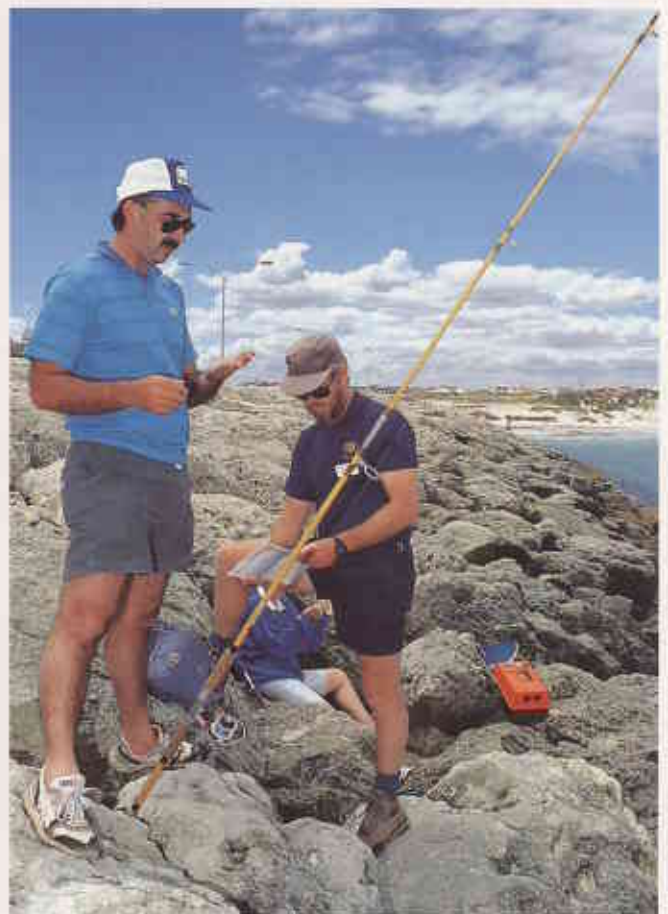
PAYING FOR THE PRIVILEGE

CALM's wildlife research staff have never been short of people willing to volunteer. While opportunities are scarce, those people lucky enough to assist researchers with their field work



Below left: Volunteers are important information providers.
Photo - Bryan Utley

Below right: Volunteers hand out information leaflets about Marmion Marine Park to fishers and other Park users.
Photo - Bryan Utley



obtain a privileged excursion into a world that many people are now paying large sums of money to be a part of.

Ecotourism is a term used to describe nature-based tourism. At its purest, it provides funds and able-bodied assistants for research through paying volunteers and scientific endeavour. This concept has its critics: some label it as elitist and commercial. Alternatively, supporters of ecotourism say that any scheme that provides much-needed resources for wildlife research without compromising the environment, is welcome.

Recent wildlife programs have involved volunteers in turtle tagging on the North West Cape, black rat eradication on Barrow Island, the noisy scrub-bird translocation program at Two Peoples Bay, and the endangered flora monitoring programs.

CREATING CHANGE

Volunteering is part of human nature. It's about people helping each other. It's about building a better place to live. It's also about creating change, because a person's freedom to choose where to make an effort is a statement about what



he or she sees as important.

While on the face of things volunteering is all about doing things, this is really only the vehicle for achieving other equally important objectives. Conservation and wildlife agencies worldwide now realise that conservation objectives cannot be achieved through an administrative structure alone. To achieve these objectives CALM requires the support of a knowledgeable and active constituency.

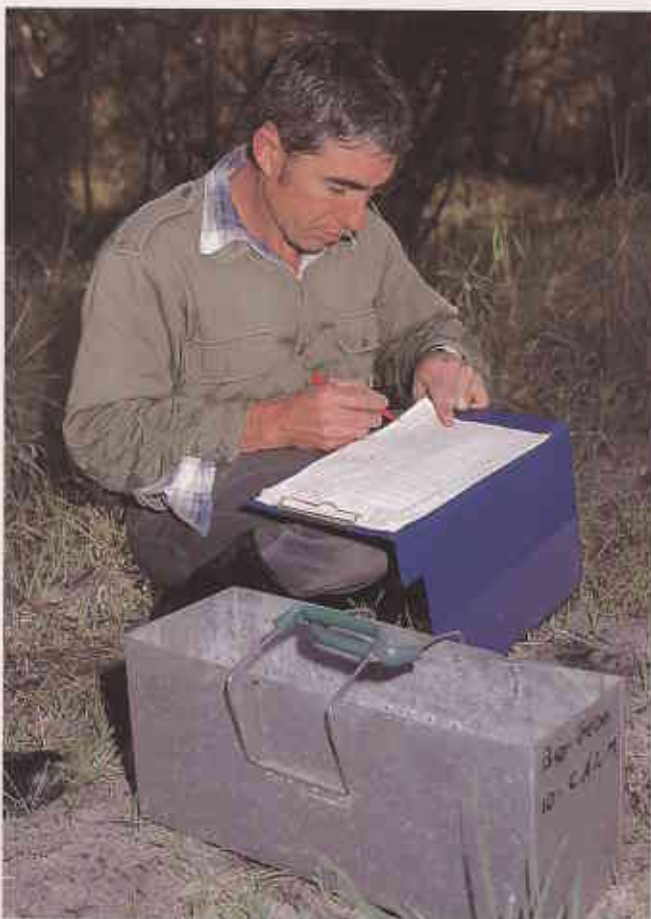
Community education and support can be achieved by a number of means. One of the most effective means is through active participation and involvement. By providing enjoyable and worthwhile experiences for people, CALM hopes the community will gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the issues that land and wildlife managers face. In doing so, it is hoped to increase individual and community awareness, thereby developing changes in human behaviour that may lead to a richer and better environment. □

Community education is an important part of developing community support.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

Below left: David James, a volunteer from the Friends of Forrestdale Lake, recording measurements during a recent survey of bandicoots.

Photo - A & K Tatnell



If you wish to become a volunteer with CALM write to the Volunteer Coordinator, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Freepost 49, Pinnacle House, 16 Ogilvie Rd, Mt Pleasant, WA 6153, or telephone (09) 364 0777.

Colin Ingram is CALM's Community Involvement Coordinator. He is involved in developing programs to enlist the support of the corporate and wider community. Colin can be contacted on the same number.

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME EIGHT NO. 2 SUMMER ISSUE 1992-3



Twenty-three captive-bred chuditch were recently released in the Julimar forest in an attempt to establish a new population. The story of the 'Return of the Chuditch' is on page 10.



'Back in the Outback' (page 34) follows the trail of endangered mammals recently reintroduced into the Gibson Desert from Barrow Is.



In a remote corner of the Gibson Desert lies Lake Gregory, a birdwatcher's paradise. See page 16.



A silent workforce of volunteers assist CALM with a multitude of projects. Colin Ingram tells us more about these 'Volunteers for Nature' on page 28.



The urban cat vies with its feral cousin and the fox for top spot in the predator stakes. See 'Masterly Marauders' on page 20.

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The chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroi*) was once found in every State and Territory of mainland Australia. Now it is only found in the jarrah forest and parts of the southern wheatbelt in the south-west of WA - about two percent of its former range.

The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky.



Managing Editor: Ron Kawailiak

Editor: David Gough

Contributing Editors: Vema Costello, Helenka Johnson, Carolyn Thomson

Scientific and technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Roger Underwood

Design and production: Sue Marais, Sandra Mitchell

Finished art: Gooitzen van der Meer, Sue Marais

Advertising: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (09) 389 8644 Fax: 389 8296

Illustration: Ian Dickinson, Sandra Mitchell

Cartography: CALM Land Information Branch

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.