

A MAGIC MOMENT

Rarely is it possible to be in the right place at the right time. However, a recent trip to the Eyre Bird Observatory for a bird-banding course provided one such moment - to witness the hatching of a malleefowl.

The Observatory, south of the Eyre Highway near Cocklebidly, is set in the mallee and coastal vegetation of the vast Nuytsland Nature Reserve.

On the last day of the course, the group went out late in the afternoon to dig into an active mound of a malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*). The aim was to supply a sample of discarded eggshell to a researcher at the South Australian Museum, where the extraction and analysis of DNA will assist his study of various malleefowl populations across Australia.

The chosen mound was in

a shallow valley of mallee woodland, with a scattering of native pine (*Callitris* spp.). It was about four metres in diameter and one and a half metres high. A number of orange-fruiting bodies of saprophytic fungi stood out of the sloping sides of the mound. Saprophytic fungi live on dead organic material, and was evidence that active composting was occurring within the mound, providing the heat for egg incubation.

Under the direction of course leader Dr Stephen Davies, excavation slowly proceeded to about a metre. From there Stephen continued cautiously until a bright pink egg was uncovered.

With further searching another egg was found adjacent to the first. No sooner had this been discovered, when there was tiny explosion,

and out of the egg popped a malleefowl chick!

Although light conditions were poor, those with cameras were busily clicking away trying to record this magic moment.

Under normal circumstances, the chick would take 24 hours to dig its way to the surface of the mound thus drying out its wings. On emerging the hatching must be completely independent as the parents take no interest in its welfare once it has hatched.

Since this chick had not been through the drying process, it was taken back to the Observatory to keep it dry



Two days after emerging from its egg, this malleefowl found near the Eyre Bird Observatory had dried and was ready for release. Photo - Peter Hewett

and warm overnight and then released the following morning. While it was none the worse for its close encounter of the human kind, those present were enriched by the experience.

Peter Hewett

SHELL BEACH CONSERVATION PARK

The unique Shell Beach at Shark Bay is now a conservation park. The park, gazetted earlier this year, is the first for the Mid-west region.

Shell Beach, a stretch of

coastline about 150 kilometres long, is formed from billions of tiny white shells deposited almost 10 metres deep.

The Department of Conservation and Land

Management (CALM) plans to develop day-use facilities at the site compatible with the protection of this unique feature.

Virtually everyone who visits Monkey Mia by car calls in to Shell Beach. Despite this, local agencies had little scope to control visitor activities because the beach was on vacant Crown land. Vehicles were often driven on to the beach, breaking and compacting the shells and forming unsightly tracks in this unique landform.

CALM will attempt to rehabilitate the beach to its former state.

The shell deposits on the beach formed some 4 000 years ago, when large populations of the bivalve *Fragum erugatum* flourished in the ultra-saline conditions of L'Haridon Bight and the nearby Hamelin Pool. Over time, the lower and older deposits became compacted to form solid material known as coquina.

Several buildings in Denham and on surrounding stations are built from blocks of the compacted shells taken from Hamelin Pool. This activity is now strictly controlled and blocks can only be cut to repair existing shell-block buildings.

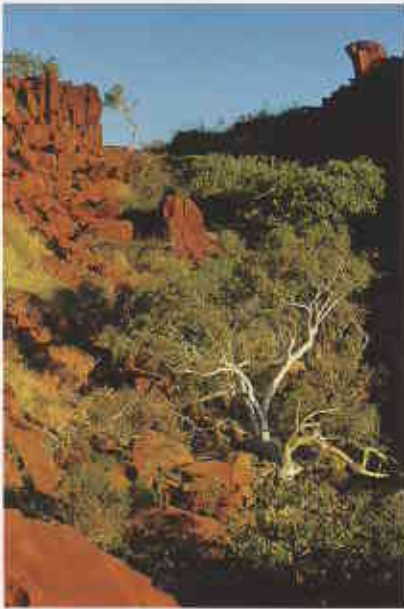
Conservation parks are areas with significant regional or local conservation or recreation values and are managed in the same way as national parks.



Shell Beach is formed from billions of tiny bivalve shells lying some 10 metres deep. Photo - Robert Garvey

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME EIGHT NO. 4 WINTER ISSUE 1993



Nature-based tourism is a rapidly-growing industry and WA is poised to take a slice of that growth. See 'Our Natural Advantage' on page 10.



Frogs can be an interesting addition to any suburban native garden. Grant Wardell-Johnson describes how to attract them to your garden on page 16.



'Seagrass, Surf and Sea Lions' (page 21) are just some of the features of a string of islands that dot the WA coastline north of Lancelin.



Forrestdale Lake is an 'Outer City Sanctuary' for thousands of visiting and resident waterbirds. See page 35.



When is a flower not a flower? Neville Marchant, from CALM's WA Herbarium unravels the intricacies of the State's many 'False Flowers' on page 39.

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COVER

The bull frog (*Litoria moorei*) is very large and has a voracious appetite. It is a frequent visitor to gardens and may be found particularly in greenhouses, ferneries and wet areas such as streams and ponds.

The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky, inspired by a Peter Marsack photograph, courtesy of Lochman Transparencies.



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