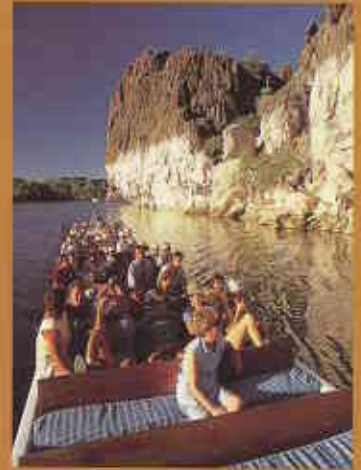


## Our Natural Advantage



Syd Shea and Jim Sharp

Worldwide tourism is booming. It is the world's largest and fastest-growing industry. Some estimates indicate an increase of eight per cent per annum. However, nature-based tourism is growing at almost four times that rate, resulting in a growing number of overseas visitors to our vast continent. Syd Shea and Jim Sharp show why Western Australia is well situated to take advantage of this increase.



**R**ecently, there has evolved a new breed of tourist - one who is more interested in what a country has to offer by way of natural experiences, than in simply lying on a beach or staying within the protective shell of a luxury hotel or resort. These nature-based tourists want to venture out into the heart of a country, to experience its sights, sounds and smells, to feel the bare earth beneath their feet, and, in some cases, to sleep under the stars. The number of people who want their holiday experience to be based on the natural environment is growing worldwide at more than 30 per cent per annum. Western Australia already has a significant tourism industry and all the prerequisites for its continued growth, including airports, transport systems, a range of accommodation and skilled friendly people to service the needs of visitors. But there are other tourist destinations throughout the world that have these assets.

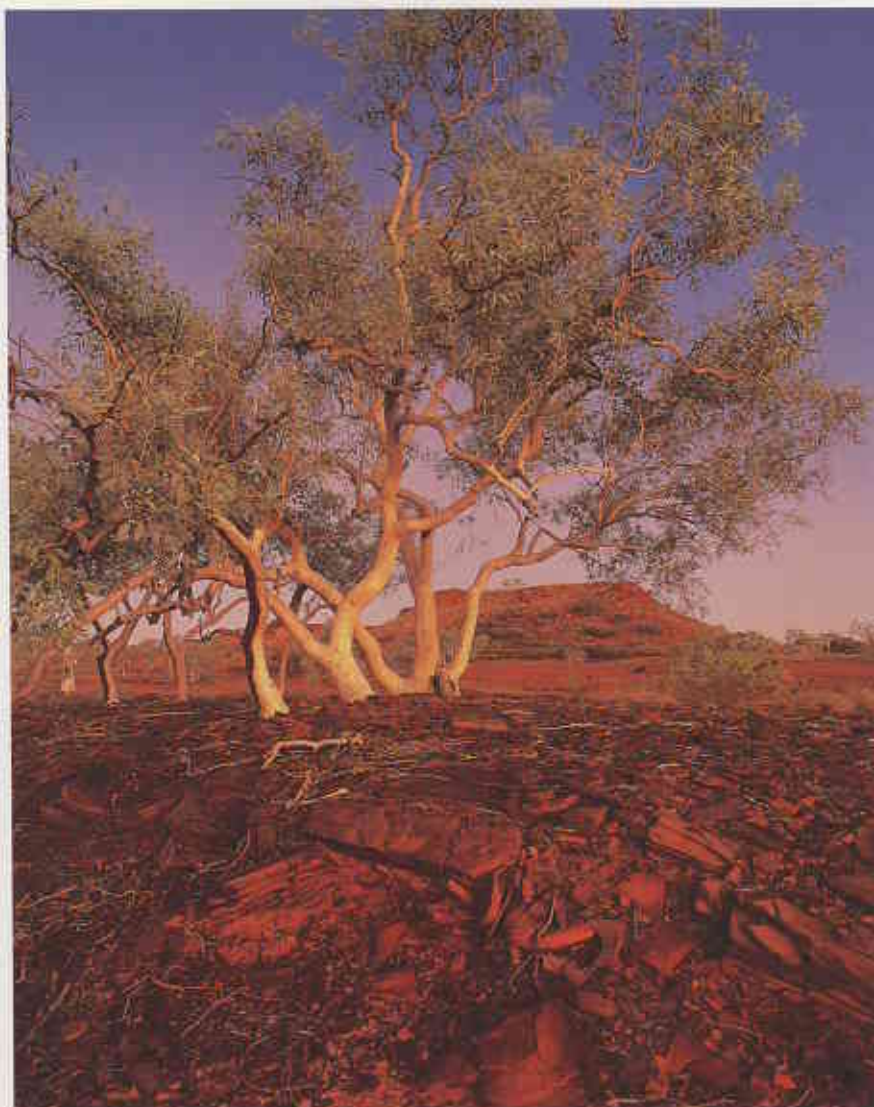
So what makes Western Australia a more appealing tourist destination?

Western Australia's predominant attraction is the uniqueness of its natural environment - its unusual plants and animals; its culture, bizarre and beautiful landscapes and its vastness - which can be packaged into the type of tourist experience that has become the premium tourist product.

## NATURE-BASED TOURISM

There have been various attempts to define this tourist 'product'. For example, ecotourism has been described as a form of tourism that is based on undisturbed natural areas, does not damage or degrade the environment, contributes to protecting and managing the areas being visited, and is subject to appropriate management. More recently, the term 'endemic tourism' has been coined. This recognises that tourists are interested in what is unique to any given place, including the cultural characteristics and values of communities that are linked to the natural environment.

Regardless of how we define the attraction, tourists visiting Australia have made it quite clear what they are seeking. In systematic surveys, more than 70 per cent of visitors have identified the principal reasons for their decision to holiday in Australia as the unusual birds and animals, interesting landscapes and



**Above:** Snappy gum (*Eucalyptus leucophloia*) in Millstream-Chichester National Park.

Photo - Chris Garnett

### **Previous page**

Yampi Sound, in the far north of WA, is one of the most isolated and scenic parts of the State.

Photo - Bill Bachman

**Inset:** Boat tours, similar to this through Geike Gorge, are being developed by local Aboriginal people.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

the space or 'last frontier atmosphere'. Paradoxically, some surveys have shown that while the natural environment dominates the overseas visitor's perception of Australia, they often do not get the experience they expect because many commercial tours concentrate on urban areas. It is only very recently that there has been an upsurge in outback-type tours.

The nature-based tourist experience can be as simple and as inexpensive as a trip to the bush for billy tea and damper, or as unique as the experience of

**Right:** Mt Nameless, in Karijini National Park.

Photo - Chris Garnett

**Below right:** Boardwalks at Meekadarabee, in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, allow visitors to view the falls without impacting on their natural beauty.

Photo - Chris Garnett

**Far right:** WA's coastline is ideal for recreational snorkelling and diving.

Photo - John & Val Butler/Lochman Transparencies

swimming with whale sharks at the Ningaloo Reef. There is a rainbow of nature-based tourist experiences, with 'ecotourism' or 'endemic' tourism being just two of the colours.

However, nature-based tourism also lends itself to high-value, low-volume tourism. There are worldwide examples where nature-based tourists are willing to pay premium prices for an exclusive or unique activity. Specific segments of the natural tourism product can be designed to cater for relatively small numbers of people having high quality



experience. For example, this year at Ningaloo 1 000 tourists, some travelling from the other side of the world, paid more than half a million dollars over a six week period to experience swimming with whale sharks.

The quality of the nature-based tourist experience is, to a large degree, dependent upon the information and understanding given to the individual. It is not dependent just upon the unique natural feature itself, it is also the interpretation of the natural phenomenon that adds richness to the experience, because the type of tourist who is seeking nature is also inevitably seeking knowledge. We are now seeing significant numbers of tourists willing

to pay for a richer, value-added experience, particularly if they have already paid a great deal to reach their destination.

Increasingly, tourists want a new experience the next time they go on holiday. A nature-based tourist experience, whether it includes watching and interacting with dolphins visiting the shore at Monkey Mia, participating in a night-time possum spotting exercise, or swimming with whale sharks, will provide a 'new' experience no matter how many times it is repeated.

### THE WA EXPERIENCE

Western Australia covers more than 2.5 million square kilometres - a third

of the continent's land area and coastline. It has one of the oldest landscapes on this planet and is characterised by great diversity in landform, climate and biota.

Of the 25 000 species of flowering plants found in Australia, around 12 000 are found in Western Australia with more than two-thirds of those occurring only in this State. (In the United Kingdom there are approximately 1 400 species, about the same number that occurs in just one of the State's national parks.) Western Australia is one of the few places on earth that exhibits megadiversity, as do rainforests.

The State also has 180 native mammal species (including 37 marine), 480 species of bird, 390 species of reptile, 68 species of amphibian and 1 600 species of fish (CALM 1992). Many of these plants and animals can be seen nowhere else in the world.

Quite apart from the magnificent flora and fauna, Western Australia has a wide range of habitats - remnant rainforests, karri and jarrah forests, mangroves, heathlands, wetlands, coral reefs and deserts. These are combined with bizarre landscapes, beaches and gorges, masses of wildflowers, and features such as the Pinnacles, the striped beehive domes of the Bungle Bungle massif and the meteor crater at Wolf Creek. In addition, there is relatively easy access to rare wild animals. The basic attractions that nature-based tourists are seeking - biodiversity, a high





degree of endemism and unusual landscapes - are abundant in Western Australia and give us a comparative advantage over other nature-based tourism destinations.

There has already been dramatic growth in the number and variety of nature-based tour packages available for visitors to this State. The Western Australian Tourism Commission recently published an excellent guide called *'Western Australia Nature Holidays'*, which illustrates the potential for nature-based tourism, and CALM already has 82 registered tour operators in national parks and other areas it manages. Western Australia has a nature-based product that we believe is second to none in the world.

## CULTURAL-TOURISM

Nature-based tourism is also closely linked to what is sometimes called cultural tourism.

Aboriginal culture has great potential to feature strongly in the nature-based tourism rainbow in Western Australia. Cultural-tourism presents an opportunity for Aboriginal communities to generate income and provide employment for their people at a time when visitors are keen to understand Aboriginal culture and its relationship to the natural environment.

There are several examples in the north of the State where Aboriginal people are responding to the demand from tourists seeking cultural as well as nature-based information and experiences. For example, a traditional owner of the Purnululu National Park is one of three ground tour operators permitted to take fly-in campers to the Park.

CALM is working with Mr Sam Lovell, one of the legends and pioneers of nature-based tourism in the Kimberley, to develop tours that feature Aboriginal culture and involve local Aboriginal communities in developing tourism opportunities for themselves. One program being developed is an Aboriginal cultural tour of Geikie Gorge.

The existing launch cruise tour is led by CALM rangers who explain the biology and geology of the Gorge to as many as 30 000 tourists per year. However, Sam Lovell is developing, in association with local Aboriginal people, a specialised complementary tour that will give the local Aboriginal people an opportunity to incorporate the natural attractions of Geikie Gorge, while emphasising its Aboriginal heritage.

Closer to Perth, CALM wildlife officer Trevor Walley and CALM national park ranger Hardy Derschow have been overwhelmed with bookings for their demonstrations of how south-western Aborigines derived 'tucker' from the bush.

## CONSERVING THE ADVANTAGE

CALM manages more than 19 million hectares of Western Australia - areas that include most of the natural attractions tourists wish to visit. There are strict controls on any tourist activity or development in these areas to ensure that their natural assets are not degraded. However, protection of our unique environment can only be achieved by cooperation with the community and the provision of resources for management. That is why CALM sees the

**The Pinnacles, in Nambung National Park north of Perth, attract around 150 000 visitors each year.**

Photo - Robert Garvey

**Right: Crystal clear pools, surrounded by lush vegetation, provide a tranquil and refreshing sight for visitors to the Pilbara's national parks.**

Photo - Robert Garvey

**Below right: Torndirrup National Park is one of several parks and reserves in WA's popular south coast region.**

Photo - M & I Morcombe

tourism industry as an essential partner in achieving its conservation objectives.

In a State the size of Western Australia, with its diversity of plants and animals and its often fragile landscapes, it is possible to ensure protection of the environment by regulation and policing. It is more desirable, however, to foster community understanding of our environment and sympathy for it - the inevitable consequence of a nature-based tourist experience, and one of the most powerful forces that can be unleashed to protect the environment.

There is another advantage that tourism brings to conservation, and that is money.

In Western Australia, the most significant threat to our native fauna is not bulldozers, chainsaws or tourists - it is the European fox. CALM research has shown that when this introduced predator is controlled, native animals return in abundance to areas where they previously were extinct. What is required to ensure this major conservation initiative is sustained is more human intervention in the form of funding for management.



We can no longer expect taxpayers to be able to provide the level of funds required for management of lands and wildlife, but the redirection of a small proportion of the extra tourist dollars, generated by quality nature-based experiences, would be sufficient to fund major conservation initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

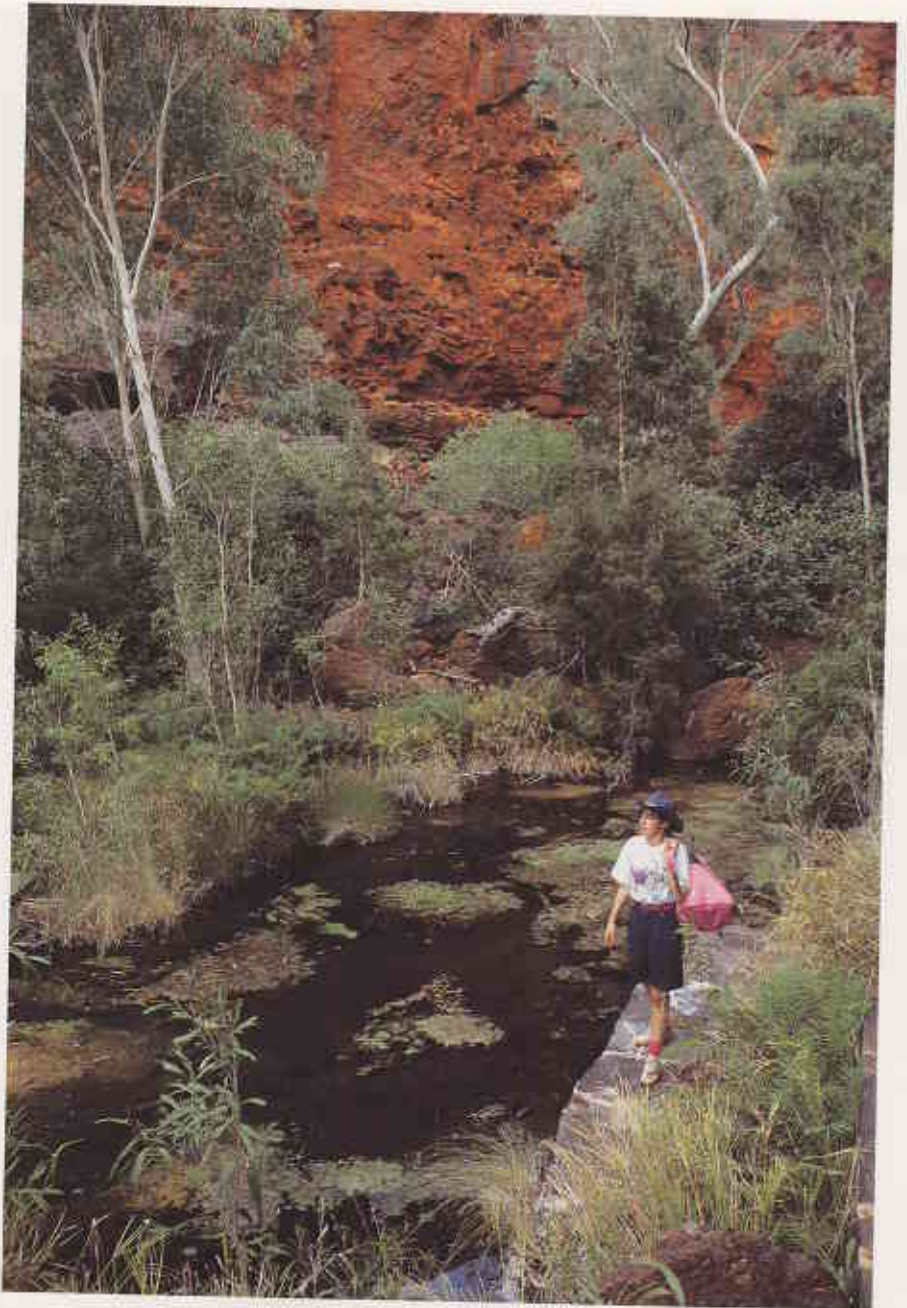
Australia is an island and has all the mystique that island nations connote; but Western Australia is an island on an island. This, together with the fact that we live on the oldest part of earth, is the reason we have a treasure trove of natural places, plants and animals.

Throughout its history, WA has suffered from isolation and, in places, from the ruggedness of its environment. It is ironic that these very factors now offer us the chance to satisfy the high demand for nature-based tourism and show our visitors the variety and value of what nature has given us.

The opportunity to capitalise on our natural advantage will disappear if the natural assets we have are lost or damaged. There is no doubt, evidenced by what has happened in many unique areas throughout the world, that people pressure, if not managed properly, can cause severe environmental degradation. Too many people, too often in the one place, can destroy the very essence of the nature-based experience. But Western Australia is a vast land and it would be possible, with appropriate management, to quadruple current visitor levels without causing damage to the environment or lessening the nature-based tourist experiences.

CALM will continue working in partnership with the tourism industry to develop this exciting and fast-growing tourist product, which will help bring prosperity to the people of Western Australia, increase awareness of the beauty and variety of our environment, and emphasise the need to conserve our unique plants, animals and places.

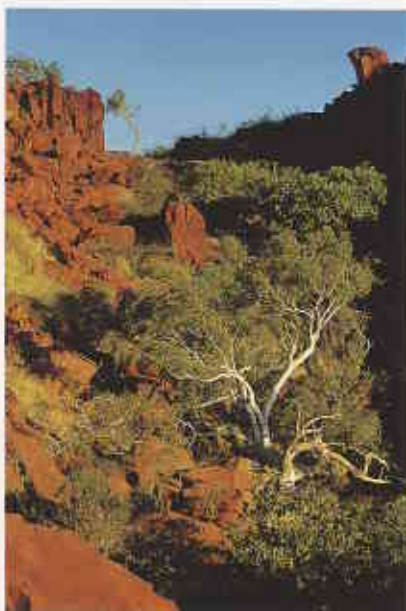
Syd Shea is Executive Director of CALM and can be contacted on (09) 386 8811.  
Jim Sharp is Manager of CALM's Policy and Extension Branch and can be contacted on (09) 364 0700.





# 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.



'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.



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.



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.

## FEATURES

<b>OUR NATURAL ADVANTAGE</b> SYD SHEA & JIM SHARP .....	10
<b>FROGS IN THE GARDEN</b> GRANT WARDELL-JOHNSON .....	16
<b>SEAGRASS SURF AND SEA LIONS</b> CAROLYN THOMSON & GREG POBAR .....	21
<b>WILLIAM DAMPIER</b> SUZANNE CURRY .....	28
<b>OUTER CITY SANCTUARY</b> ROD GIBLETT .....	35
<b>FALSE FLOWERS</b> NEVILLE MARCHANT .....	39
<b>FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME</b> KEN McNAMARA & NIGEL TREWIN .....	44
<b>OIL IN THE LEAVES</b> LIZ BARBOUR & JOHN BARTLE .....	49

## REGULARS

<b>IN PERSPECTIVE</b> .....	4
<b>BUSH TELEGRAPH</b> .....	6
<b>ENDANGERED THE SWAMP FLOWER</b> .....	27
<b>URBAN ANTICS</b> .....	54

## 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.



Managing Editor: Ron Kawalilak  
 Editor: David Gough  
 Contributing Editors: Verna Costello, Grahame Rowland, Carolyn Thomson  
 Scientific and technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Roger Underwood  
 Design and production: Sue Marais, Stacey Strickland  
 Finished art: Gooitzen van der Meer  
 Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (09) 389 8644 Fax: (09) 389 8296  
 Illustration: Sandra Mitchell  
 Cartography: CALM Land Information Branch  
 Colour Separation by Prepress Services  
 Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print  
 © ISSN 0815-4465. All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without the consent of the publishers.



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