

A large photograph of a canyon with a river and a crowd of people on the left. The canyon walls are reddish-brown and layered. A river flows through the center. On the left, a crowd of people is gathered on a dirt path. A person in a hat and overalls is standing near the water's edge. The sky is clear and blue.

TRAVEL COMPANIONS

the Visitor,
the Tour Operator
and the Manager

by Gil Field and Kate Hooper

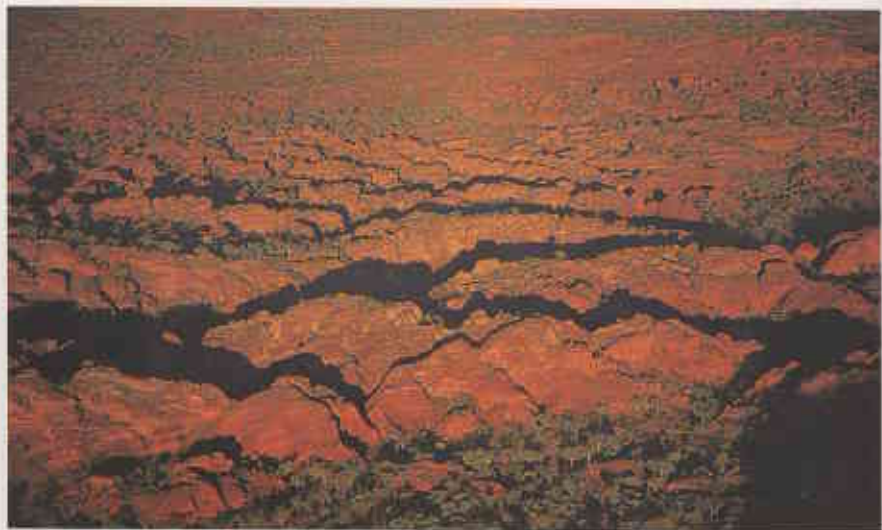
Co-operation between CALM and professional tour operators is making our national parks and reserves more accessible and helping visitors to appreciate their environmental and cultural values, while preserving the unique landscapes and ecosystems they come to see.

With its huge tracts of wilderness and its many natural wonders, Western Australia has much to offer the tourist seeking a unique natural experience (see 'Our Natural Advantage', *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 1993).

Nature-based tourism is on the move in Western Australia. For example, in 1992 more than 250 000 people visited the stunning Kimberley region in the north-west of WA. About 126 000 visits were made to Kimberley national parks and, not surprisingly, parks such as Geikie Gorge near Fitzroy Crossing and Mirima (Hidden Valley) at Kununurra, which are accessible all year round by conventional vehicle, were the most heavily visited. The more remote parks that require an 'off-road' vehicle for access, such as Purnululu and Wolfe Creek Crater, had far fewer visitors.

One of the main reasons people visit the Kimberley area is to experience the remoteness of its rugged landscapes, and currently the majority of tourists travel there independently. This is reflected in the fact that more than 70 per cent of visitors to the Kimberley are from Western Australia, and only about four per cent are from overseas. There are many arguments for introducing more visitors from Australia and overseas to the wonders of our State, but how can we do this while preserving the unique qualities of the landscapes that they have come to see?

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is responsible for the protection and management of conservation reserves and wildlife in Western Australia. One of the challenges that the Department faces is to open up



areas of natural beauty for the enjoyment of as many people as possible, while ensuring that visitors have no detrimental impact on the environment and wildlife.

GETTING OUTDOORS

By encouraging nature-based recreation and tourism, CALM aims to meet the need for healthy outdoor pursuits that are sensitive to the natural environment. 'Nature tourism' experiences can also be used as opportunities to develop people's awareness and appreciation of natural and cultural values. If such understanding contributes to the development of 'environmentally friendly' lifestyles and support for wildlife conservation, it is an investment in a better future for all of us.

CALM's book *Perth Outdoors* is a guide to the natural areas in and around Perth, and provides a menu of places to go and things to do, and a perspective on the natural environment of the Perth region. The Department's 'Perth Outdoors' initiative aims to help people

Above: The deeply eroded sandstone ranges of Mirima National Park near Kununurra in the East Kimberley.
Photo - Bill Bachman

Previous page
Main: Visitors interacting with the dolphins of Monkey Mia under supervision of local rangers.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

Inset: Lennard River Gorge, off the Gibb River Road 200 km east of Derby, epitomises 'the Kimberley experience' of rugged remoteness.

Photo - Bill Bachman

Below: Wolfe Creek crater is the world's second largest meteorite crater and is accessible for visitors with off-road vehicles.

Photo - Bill Bachman

get outdoors and enjoy nature, and has seen the re-development of Yanchep National Park and the development of facilities in The Hills Forest and in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.

Yanchep National Park has been one of Perth's most popular recreation areas for more than 60 years. The original Park buildings, dating from the 1930s,





Above: Visitors to Geikie Gorge can purchase tickets for two very different boat tours.
Photo - Marie Lochman



Above right: New boardwalks at Penguin Island, in the Shoalwater Island marine Park, provide ease of access while minimising visitor impact.
Photo - Terry Goodlich

Right: Little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) now have a more secure home on Penguin Island.
Photo - Terry Goodlich



have recently been given a facelift. The near-derelict McNess House has been converted into a visitor centre, a 1930s-style teahouse is being constructed, and the old Yanchep Inn is being developed into a resort (see 'Yanchep - The Birth and Rebirth of a Park', in this issue of *LANDSCOPE*).

The Hills Forest area covers more than 20 000 hectares of the Darling Range east of Perth, and includes State forest, several national parks and nature reserves. The area offers a wealth of different outdoor experiences, from quiet woodland walks to canoeing, fishing and camping. The Hills Forest Activities Centre is the focus for the very successful 'Go Bush!' program of activities, which presents some great opportunities to get out and enjoy the bush. The Centre now includes three buildings transported from Gnangara Forest to be used as an administrative centre, a resource centre and a forest museum. In addition, there is a courtyard seating area and a forest amphitheatre, where gatherings of up to

180 people can enjoy performances celebrating our relationship with the forest.

At Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, visitors can take a gentle cruise around the waters and islands of Shoalwater Bay, viewing sea lions, dolphins and seabirds, and stopping off at Penguin Island to see the little (fairy) penguins (*Eudyptula minor*). Visitors can now purchase their ferry tickets from the new Visitor Centre and Teahouse at Mersey Point. On Penguin Island, newly constructed boardwalks provide ease of access, while minimising impact on the Island's vegetation, so preserving the penguins' breeding habitat. A penguin-viewing area that will seat more than a hundred people is currently being designed, and should be completed in 1994.

Significant improvements have been made to many conservation reserves managed by CALM recently. Developments that advance tourism are progressing throughout Western Australia, making key areas of our natural

environment better known, more accessible and more able to accommodate larger numbers of visitors without compromising conservation values. In fact, such professionally designed development programs have actually succeeded in increasing in visitor numbers as well as enhancing conservation values, as evidenced at Penguin Island, where the tourism developments have increased the penguin breeding habitat.

PARTNERS WITH THE PEOPLE

As well as improving facilities, CALM thoroughly supports the forging of links with the tourism industry. In the 1980s, conservation managers recognised that nature tourism and conservation had more similarities than differences in intent, leading to a range of partnerships between the tourism industry and CALM. The blend of the Department's expertise in natural resource management and interpretation, with the tour operators'



Left: In the Cape Range National Park, visitors can explore Yardie Creek by boat with a licensed tour operator.

Photo - Marie Lochman

Below: Walking tours, led by the Panyjima people, provide an Aboriginal perspective of Karijini National Park.

Photo - Alan Padgett

expertise in marketing, promotion and catering for the transport and accommodation needs of visitors has already proved extremely productive. Partnerships that bring together these complimentary roles can significantly enrich visitors' experiences and contribute to the development of nature tourism in Western Australia.

In recognition of the increased

demand for nature-based tour packages, CALM issues permits to selected commercial operators to operate on CALM-managed lands and waters. The tour operators are required to protect the conservation values of the area. They are provided with information to help them to minimise impact on the environment, while maximising visitor enjoyment and understanding of the

natural and cultural values of the area visited. More than 80 such tour operators are now registered in Western Australia.

In some instances, where the effect on wildlife needs to be limited, or where visitor numbers restrict the economic viability of a tour, it makes most sense to grant exclusive use of an area to a single operator. The launch boat tour operation in Yardie Creek in Cape Range National Park, which offers visitors a glimpse of the shy black-footed rock-wallabies (*Petrogale lateralis*) living there, is an example of an exclusive licence granted after a public call for expressions of interest.

An innovative lease and licence agreement covering the developed recreational land and buildings within Yanchep National Park has been one of the factors in the revitalisation of the Park. As well as investing in new facilities at the Park, the successful tenderer has taken responsibility for the day-to-day running of the picnic areas, golf course and cave tours.

This leaves CALM staff free to concentrate on wildlife management and visitor communication programs. The lively Interpretive Activities Program now





offered during each school holiday period, has proved extremely popular with visitors of all ages, and is testament to the success of this lease arrangement. Everyone is a winner in this partnership - CALM, the lease-holders, the visitors and the wildlife.

In some places, co-operative arrangements between CALM and the local Shire have proved extremely fruitful. The famous Monkey Mia Reserve, which annually gives thousands of visitors the opportunity to interact with dolphins, is jointly vested in the Shire of Shark Bay and CALM. The arrangement combines the local knowledge and skills of the Shire and its staff, with CALM expertise in land, marine reserve, wildlife and visitor management.

With funding from the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA), CALM has employed Sam Lovell, an Aboriginal tour operator with years of Kimberley experience, to assist the Darlŋunaya Aboriginal Corporation in launching a nature-based tourism venture at Geikie Gorge National Park in the Kimberley (see 'Bush Telegraph', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 1993). Bunuba Aboriginal Cultural Tours explore Geikie Gorge by boat and on foot, allowing visitors to share the rich cultural heritage of the Bunuba people. This partnership is enriching visitors' understanding of the cultural values of the Park, while providing opportunities for the local Aboriginal community to generate income and provide employment for their people.

Visitors are increasingly keen to understand Aboriginal culture and its relation to the natural environment, and

CALM has recently conducted two 'cultural interpretation' workshops for Aborigines. Such initiatives aim to develop the participants' skills as activity leaders in the tourism industry, and help them to pass on their intimate knowledge of the landscape and wildlife. Some participants have since found employment in CALM's activity programs at Yanchep National Park and The Hills Forest. Others have used the workshop to refine the cultural tourism programs in which they were previously involved.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

CALM is keen to develop even stronger working relationships with potential partners in the tourism industry. Two workshops held far apart demonstrate the benefits to be reaped from such partnerships.

Perup Forest, 50 kilometres from Manjimup in the South West of WA, is a very special place, as it supports viable populations of at least six threatened mammal species: numbat, chuditch, woylie, tammar wallaby, western ringtail possum and southern brown bandicoot. At CALM's Perup Forest Ecology Centre, local tour operators gathered together with professionals in nature-based tourism, communication, environmental and wildlife management and local history. The aim of the workshop was to show the operators how to give their clients memorable experiences, while developing an understanding of how nature functions, how the locals interact with nature, and how CALM manages the land to accommodate these pressures. The participants shared an experience

Above left: The Pinnacles Desert, in Nambung National Park, is WA's most popular park destination for Perth-based tour groups.

Photo - Brian L. Downs/Lochman Transparencies

Above right: A hovercraft tour explores the shallow seagrass meadows between Carnarvon and Monkey Mia without fear of injury to grazing dugongs or inquisitive dolphins.

Photo - Bill Bachman

they would value and remember. They also had the opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills. They came away with a better understanding of how CALM operates and of the complexities of land management in the Southern Forest Region. In return, CALM learnt much about the needs and aspirations of the operators, and many new friendships were forged.

At the other end of the State, at Purnululu National Park (more commonly known as The Bungle Bungles) in the East Kimberley, a workshop for tour operators was held prior to the dry season influx of tourists.

Purnululu National Park protects the remarkable 350-million-year-old sandstone beehive-like formations of the Bungle Bungle massif, a considerably older limestone ridge of great significance to local Aboriginal groups, the Osmand Range, and the surrounding savanna woodlands. The Park offers a truly remote wilderness experience. Visitors can explore the deep red gorges of the Bungle Bungle massif, where there are patches

of remnant rainforest. The northern naitail wallaby (*Onychogalea unguifera*) and euro (*Macropus robustus*) live around the massif, and there are more than 130 bird species in the Park, including rainbowbee-eaters (*Merops ornatus*) and flocks of bright green budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*).

To reach the spectacular Bungle Bungle by road, visitors have to negotiate 50 kilometres of very rough track. Because of its inaccessibility, only 8 500 people visited Purnululu National Park in 1992, but 30 000 flew over the Park with the six airtour companies that operate there. Tour operators bring 40 per cent of the visitors to Purnululu National Park, and more than half the visitors take the on-site helicopter tour over the Bungle Bungle massif. From the air, the massif is an imposing sight, and this is the best way to gain a perspective of its immense size. Many visitors declare it to be the flight of a lifetime.

The Purnululu National Park is a phenomenon not just for its natural and cultural values, but also as a case study in nature-based tourism. Purnululu is at



the special end of the nature tourism market. A relatively small number of visitors invest a large amount of time, effort and money to have a special experience there. In its management of the Park, CALM aims to reconcile environmental and wildlife conservation with visitor needs and tour operator opportunities.

The Tour Operators Interpretation Workshop at Purnululu was timed to coincide with the setting up of tour operators' base camps within the Park,

and with the park rangers' preparation of the camping areas for the tourist season. During the wet season the grass had grown to more than two metres high, and rangers were busy slashing the camp sites and getting water through to them. Of the three camping areas, two cater for general campers and tour groups, and one is now exclusively set aside for three special lease Fly-Drive operations. These allow visitors to be flown into the Park, met on the ground by the tour operator and taken on a tour in an off-road vehicle.



Left: CALM Ranger Paul Butters led a bush tucker activity during the recent Tour Operators' Workshop at Purnululu National Park.
Photo - Gil Field

Below left: Caving within Cape Range National Park is permitted for guided access only, to protect the cave formations and wildlife as well as cavers.
Photo - Geoff Taylor/Lochman Transparencies

Right: A less familiar face of the Bungle Bungle Range in Purnululu National Park.
Photo - M&I Morcombe

The workshop was an opportunity to develop further CALM's relationship with the tourism industry and its operators. There were seminar sessions and a range of 'hands-on' activities, designed to demonstrate the different ways in which people learn and communicate. Aboriginal Park Ranger Paul Butters together with Raymond Wallaby, whose people live within the National Park at the Kwarre Aboriginal living area, explained some of the traditional links that the Kija people have with the land. They took the participants on a bush tucker trail through one of the camping areas, identifying various plants, giving their Kija and botanical names and describing their uses. Then it was on to Echidna Chasm at sunset, where the deep narrow gorge resounded to the sounds of a didgeridoo.

To gaze at the Kimberley night sky is a memorable experience, and the operators were given a tour of the 'galactic wilderness', which they could share with their clients. There was an introduction to the wildlife of the Park, and spotlighting and other wildlife observation techniques were explained. It is the geology of the Park that most intrigues visitors to Purnululu, and a visit to 'the lookout' on top of a volcanic extrusion provided a vantage point from which to read the landscape. Finally, rangers explained the steps being taken to rehabilitate the eroded areas resulting from one hundred years of grazing before the area became a national park.

In sharing ideas and experiences through discussions and activities, it was apparent that tour operators can and do make a significant contribution to the interpretation of both the natural and

cultural values of the Park. Better-informed operators and their clients can only mean more support for the Park's management. The shared intent of this partnership, to create memorable experiences for Park visitors that enhance their appreciation of and support for the Park's natural and cultural values, ensures a vibrant future for nature tourism in WA's north-west.

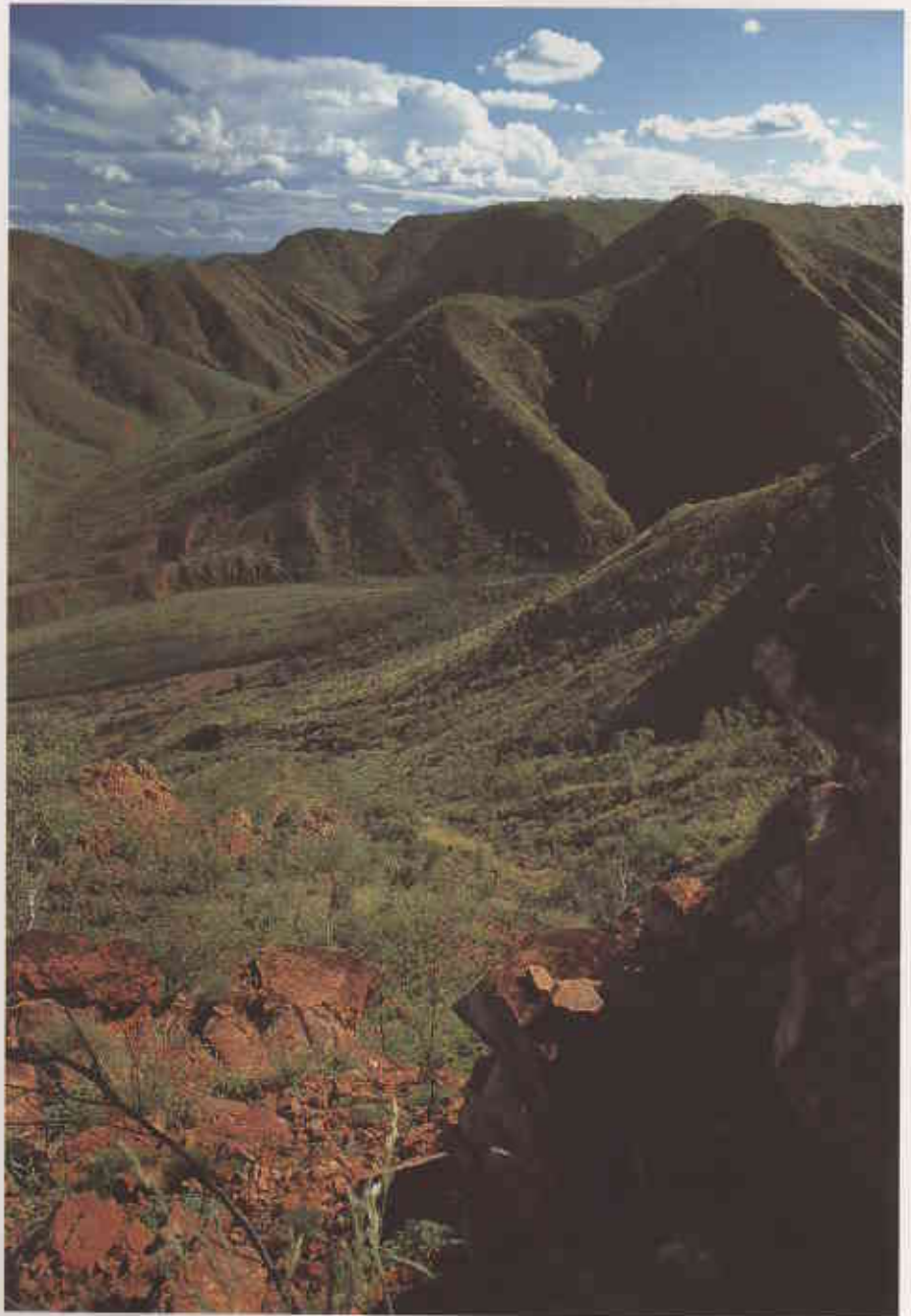
PARTNERS IN NATURE

In these economically difficult times both the public and private sectors of the community need to be adaptable, innovative and resourceful. Partnerships in nature tourism are a way of achieving positive outcomes for all. A carefully crafted partnership, whether it be a

permit, licence, lease, co-operative arrangement or a learning exchange, has the potential to benefit visitors, tour operators, conservation managers, the local community and the natural environment.

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LANDSCOPE

VOLUME TEN, NO. 2 SUMMER ISSUE 1993-94



The galah is just one of the many bird species that visit our urban and suburban gardens. 'Birds in the Garden' shows us how we can attract more.



In spring, the Wongan Hills are ablaze with wildflowers, but this 'island' sanctuary is also a home to a wide variety of animals. See page 21.



Yanchep National Park is having a facelift. Our story on page 28 examines the history and rebirth of one of Perth's closest and most visited national parks.



Banksia gardneri var. brevidentata is one of a number of plants named in honour of Charles Gardner. See 'Gardner's World' on page 41.



The Pinnacles is one of several destinations for licensed tours operating in WA's national parks. See 'Travel Companions'.

FEATURES

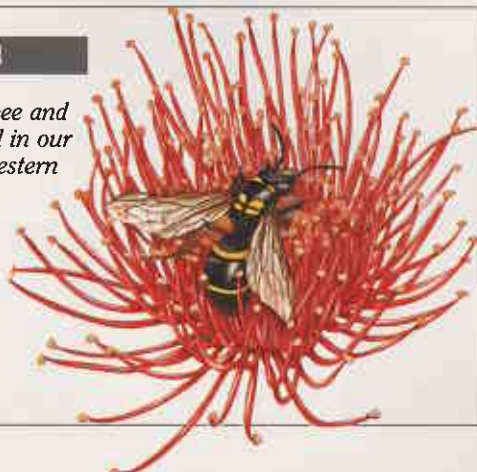
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COVER

Hyleoides zonalis is a solitary bee and one of the native bees described in our story about the 'real' bees of Western Australia on page 17. The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky.



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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.