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SEARCHING FOR MONTY



Pythons are patient. They may sit for days coiled, motionless and well-camouflaged, ready to ambush a passing animal to supply their next meal.

Their secretive habits and low abundance make them difficult to find and even harder to count! This poses particular problems for their conservation.

While studying python records at the WA Museum, researcher Laurie Smith noticed that specimens of two south-western species — the carpet python and the woma python — sent to the Museum had declined sharply over the last 40 years. The situation needed investigation, but how do you assess population declines of animals that are notoriously difficult to see?

"We decided to use the eyes and expertise of people who spend long periods in the bush and are most likely to encounter pythons," CALM scientist David Pearson said.

A pilot survey was begun with some CALM staff and

The south-western population of the woma python has declined markedly in the last 30 years. Any sightings would be particularly valuable to aid its survival.

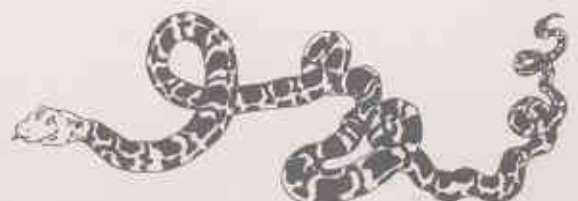
Photo - Brad Maryon

herpetologists (people who study reptiles and amphibians).

"Questionnaires covering past sightings, and survey forms on which to record future sightings were distributed in September 1993 and the response has been excellent, with many new and interesting records received," David said.

"Results indicated that concerns raised by Laurie Smith about the woma python were very real, with only four recent sightings in the south-west."

If you can help by recording python sightings, contact David Pearson at CALM, PO Box 51, Wanneroo WA 6065, who will mail you a python observation kit. With your help, we can establish the distribution and abundance of pythons in the past and at present, and provide a baseline for future surveys.



LANDSCOPE

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Yellow-billed spoonbills have visited Star Swamp for the last three years. They sift small crustaceans from the shallow water. The story of this suburban wetland is told on page 45.



A marine park is proposed to adjoin the Prince Regent Nature Reserve. The Complex Coast (page 49) discusses the need for integrated management of land and sea around our coast.



Found all over Australia, short-beaked echidnas are one of two Australian egg-laying mammals. They still occur around Perth. See page 18.



About a quarter of Stirling Range National Park has been closed to protect its unique flora from dieback disease. Turn to page 10 to discover these plants on the edge.



The orange-bellied frog is part of the South West's fine-scale richness and variety. Find out more about these fascinating creatures on page 35.

COVER

The coral gardens in the sheltered lagoons of the Rowley Shoals contain dozens of different varieties of staghorn coral and are inhabited by a huge range of colourful reef fish. See 'Coral for Keeps' on page 28.

The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky.



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