







# Neerabup

NATIONAL PARK

by  
David Gough and Ron Shimmon



*As you travel north from Perth to Yanchep National Park you pass a long, thin and seemingly ordinary piece of Australian bush, nestled by the side of the road.*

*But if you stop and venture beyond the first few metres of banksias or tuarts, you will find a relatively undisturbed example of coastal plain vegetation that is Neerabup National Park. ►*

**N**eerabup National Park is about 27 kilometres north of Perth along the western side of Wanneroo Road. It is a long, narrow piece of bushland between half a kilometre and three kilometres wide, stretching about 12 kilometres in length between Burns Beach Road and Romeo Road. But this small park is still able to provide a feeling of tranquillity and isolation in an ever-expanding urban world.

The 1 082-hectare park follows an old stock route, which in turn follows part of the Aboriginal migration route between Lake Joondalup, in the Yellagonga Regional Park, and Loch McNess, in Yanchep National Park. The route forms the basis for the 28-kilometre Yaberoo Budjara Heritage Trail, developed in 1988 as one of a network of heritage trails marking the Australian Bicentenary.

The park has no prominent features, such as lakes, mountains, streams, and no formal recreational areas, such as picnic sites, within its boundaries. Access to the park is by foot as there are no roads or carparks. The City of Wanneroo has two small picnic areas just outside the park alongside Wanneroo Road, one of which is at the start of the 10th Light Horse Memorial Trail. But despite this lack of formal recreation facilities, the park offers people, particularly local residents, opportunities for quiet recreation and a place to get away from the stresses of day-to-day life in the city. In spring, for example, the whole area comes alive with stunning displays of wildflowers accompanied by the clamorous songs of countless birds, providing a feast for the eyes and ears.

## PLANTS

The limestone caprock that is prevalent throughout the park supports varied vegetation, ranging from jarrah-tuart woodlands through to open banksia woodlands and hakea-dryandra heathlands.

The vegetation in the national park north of Quinns Road is low woodland and open woodland of sheoak, banksia, Western Australian Christmas tree and pricklybark. There are a few patches of jarrah and one of tuart and a diverse understorey of hakea, kangaroo paws, scrub sheoak, one-sided bottlebrush, native buttercups, native wisteria, dodder, old man's beard and prickly moses. Most of the heath is on an extensive area of limestone hills lying west of Wanneroo Road and comprises mainly wattle, cockies' tongues, and balgas (blackboys). A wildfire that swept through part of this northern section in early 1994 produced a beautiful display of wildflowers the following spring.

Vegetation in the park south of Quinns Road is mainly woodland of jarrah associated with sheoak, slender banksia and Menzies' banksia. There is also some open tuart woodland and a few pricklybark and marri trees. The narrow-leaved red mallee (*Eucalyptus foecunda*) is listed as a priority species and is geographically restricted along the coast between Lancelin and Mandurah. It occurs along the western boundary of the park.

Weeds such as blue lupins and Cape tulip occur in parts of the park, especially those areas adjacent to cleared rural land. They also occur along parts of the Yaberoo Budjara Heritage Trail, but weeds in these areas are more easily controlled than those occurring in other parts of the park.



### Previous page

**Main:** The common catspaw is one of a host of wildflowers found each spring in Neerabup National Park.

Photo – Michael James

**Inset:** The view across the park to the ocean from One Tree Hill Lookout.

Photo – Marie Lochman

**Left:** The balga (also known as grass tree or blackboy) is abundant on open limestone heath, found mainly in the northern section of the park.

Photo – Michael James





## ANIMALS

Despite their apparent high numbers, especially in nearby Yanchep National Park, the Carnaby's black-cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus latirostris*) is a threatened species. It also occurs in Neerabup National Park, and Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) guidelines for management of the area take into account the need to protect habitat such as nesting hollows, and maintain unburnt areas of limestone heathland as food sources for cockatoos through a mosaic (patch) burning system.

Walking through the park in early morning or late afternoon you will almost certainly see western grey kangaroos and, possibly, emus. However, the park is also home to other native animals such as echidnas, brushtail possums and brush wallabies.

Unfortunately, feral cats, rabbits and foxes are present in large numbers, making life difficult and hazardous for native animals, particularly small mammals such as the quenda (southern brown bandicoot), noodji (ash grey mouse) and honey possum.

## NOWERGUP FAUNA SANCTUARY

Adjoining the park, across Wanneroo Road from the north-east corner, is Nowergup Fauna Sanctuary. This class 'A' reserve covers an area of 117 hectares from the western part of Nowergup Lake to Wanneroo Road. The topography of the reserve falls rapidly by about 50 metres to the lake shore from the road. Although the reserve is primarily accessed by foot

from Wanneroo Road, it has been degraded by illegal four-wheel drive and woodcutting activities. Rabbits are also present and have caused considerable degradation.

In the past, Nowergup Lake was known for its excellent water. A Nyoongar Aboriginal Dreaming story, recounted to explorer George Grey in 1838, suggests the lake's name roughly translates as 'place of sweet water' and, according to locals, the water remained clear and sweet until recently. There has been a piggery on the eastern side of the lake for more than 60 years and there have been cattle near the lake since the early days of settlement, when the area was used for summer grazing by pastoralists.

The western edge of the lake is fringed with jointed twig rush, with bulrushes occurring on the northern shore. Bordering the sedgeland is woodland of flooded gum and swamp banksia. The corky barked tree *Gyrostemon ramulosus* is a fire opportunist species that is uncommon, but occurs in the reserve. There is some low open forest of paperbark, with mature closed swamp paperbark woodland at the south end of the lake. The eastern and northern banks of the lake contain isolated pockets of seasonally inundated land, which form an ideal habitat for birds.

Large numbers of waterfowl use the lake. These include black swans, Pacific black ducks, Australian shelducks, maned ducks, grey teal, swamp-hens, coots, musk ducks and blue-billed ducks. Sacred kingfishers nest in hollow trees by the water's edge. Wading birds, such as red-

**Above:** The red-kneed dotterel is one of several species of wading birds that search for food in the shallow waters around the edge of Nowergup Lake.  
Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Above left:** Looking east across Nowergup Lake. The eastern side of the lake is private farm property.  
Photo - Kim Howe

kneed dotterels and red-necked avocets, use the lake margins as water levels fall. They wade through the shallow water, probing the mud in search of food. Because of the limited human use of the area and the fact that the lake doesn't dry up—although its surface area may be greatly reduced—it is probable that Nowergup Lake is a significant drought refuge and breeding area for some of these birds.

Other animals that inhabit the sanctuary include carpet pythons, brush wallabies, bearded dragons and Gould's monitors, and these animals may also be found in the national park across the road.

## RECREATION

Neerabup National Park is valuable in providing gentle recreational activities such as photography, walking, bird watching and nature study. Use of the park for recreation is already increasing as urban growth continues along its western edge and local residents 'discover' its secrets. The park is readily accessible to residents in the suburbs of Joondalup, Currabine, Burns, Clarkson and Merriwa.



The Yaberoo Budjara Heritage Trail runs through the full length of Neerabup National Park on its journey from Lake Joondalup to Loch McNess in Yanchep National Park. Stage 2 of the trail runs from Burns Beach Road to Quinns Road, and stage 3 runs from Quinns Road to Romeo Road. Stage 4 runs through a road reserve north of the park towards stage 5, which enters Yanchep National Park at Lacey Road.

A recent addition to the park is the 10th Light Horse Memorial Trail, which was developed jointly by CALM, the City of Wanneroo and the Wanneroo Historical Society. The area of the park through which the trail runs was the last permanent camp site of the 10th Light Horse Regiment, which was disbanded in 1944. The 1300-metre walktrail is well signed and takes you on a sometimes humorous journey, describing life in the Regiment. It begins at the refurbished picnic area in a road reserve by the side of Wanneroo Road, about one kilometre north of Flynn Road. A new pergola with seats and a gas barbecue has been erected there, and the start of the trail is a few metres beyond, at the boundary of the park. There are no facilities within the park itself.

A lookout is located at One Tree Hill, west of Wanneroo Road and just south of the Ocean View Tavern. At present, only a flight of steps runs up the hill from the road. The area is densely vegetated and there is no easily visible trail from the top of the steps to the lookout itself, but with a little perseverance, it's possible to get there. Development of this area as a picnic site would provide people with extensive views across the park.

**Top:** Photographing wildflowers is an activity that can be enjoyed in this peaceful park.

Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

**Centre:** The familiar, bright orange-yellow flowers of the WA Christmas tree can be seen in the park around November to December.

Photo – Kim Howe

**Left:** Early morning or late afternoon walkers will almost certainly see western grey kangaroos.

Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies





**Above:** This narrow piece of native bush has been used as a dumping ground for household rubbish and stolen cars.  
Photo – David Gough

**Right:** The Yaberoo Budjara Heritage Trail runs through the full length of the park.  
Photo – Rob Davis



## DISTURBING THE PIECE

The southernmost end of the area now covered by Neerabup National Park has a long history of disturbance—principally from the extraction of limestone in the 1900s for building blocks and road-making material. Old quarries in this southern section have now largely been rehabilitated. According to the Environmental Protection Authority's 'Red Book' System 6 recommendations (1983) there are: 'proposals to adjust the boundaries of the park to allow the Mitchell Freeway to run along its western boundary, and in one place it is proposed to build the freeway within the park'.

Urban development close to areas of bushland almost always heralds the flight of native animals; not so much because of the increased numbers of people, but because of loss of habitat and predation by introduced species such as cats. This has been happening all along the northern corridor as housing developments have spread northwards from Perth.

Neerabup National Park provides a narrow corridor to allow movement of animals along the coastal plain and associated wetlands. By preserving the habitat values of these areas and, with the assistance of forward-thinking developers, retaining smaller arterial strips to and from the coast, a network of adjoining corridors can be maintained and animals can move freely without the risk of being 'cut off'.

One of the problems confronting CALM staff is the removal of the old and

stolen cars and rubbish that are regularly dumped in the park. In addition, activities such as horse riding and trail bike riding are damaging the delicate landscape.

## FUTURE MANAGEMENT

At present, no formal management plan exists for Neerabup National Park, but the current guidelines for management of the park contain objectives to protect and manage its landscape, flora, fauna, archaeological and historic values, and maintain it for the enjoyment of its natural resources by the public. Public access will need to be controlled where park values are being disturbed or damaged, and this can be achieved by closing and rehabilitating illegal horse trails, unwanted tracks and quarries.

The long, narrow shape of the park makes management difficult and, in particular, poses problems for the development of recreational facilities. These problems could be helped by the addition of an area to the south-east of the park, also proposed in the 'Red Book'. Access to any future recreation development in this area would then be possible directly from Wanneroo Road. The addition of this area would also give the park improved representation of the local ecosystems.

This park has a vital role in the preservation of the natural environment in the northern corridor. It provides an escape for humans from the rigours of city life, a movement corridor for native animals, a green belt between coastal

housing and the string of wetlands running north from Lake Joondalup, and an important remnant of coastal vegetation in a fast-growing urban area.

CALM staff responsible for the management of Neerabup National Park would like to see people making greater recreational use of the area—thereby experiencing, at first hand, its natural values and gaining a sense of ownership of the park. The setting up of a 'friends' group is one way that people can assist CALM and other land managers in helping to maintain and care for natural areas. Friends groups, like those associated with the Canning River Regional Park, Star Swamp (see *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 1994), Woodman Point and Trigg Bushland, continue to play an important part in the management of such areas.

Neerabup National Park is no different. It's your park! Explore it, get to know it, and enjoy it.

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The authors acknowledge the assistance of local resident David Lamont, of CALM's Roadside Conservation Committee.

# LANDSCOPE

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The golden whistler is a common forest bird. 'Forest Focus' (on page 10) discusses a five-year study into the effects of timber harvesting on forest birds, insects and mammals.



The 10th Light Horse Memorial Trail is one of two walktrails in Neerabup National Park. The story on page 22 takes you inside this little-known park in Perth's northern suburbs.



In the closing days of 1991, heavy downpours of rain flooded Rowles Lagoon in WA's Goldfields; and so began an unusual year of floods, frogs, flowers and fires (see page 42).



Aboriginal people of the northern deserts call the black-headed python 'warrurungkalpa', which roughly translates as 'grinder or crusher of rock wallabies'. See the story on page 17.



Radio collars are fitted to feral cats to help scientists track their movements. 'Hunting the Hunter', on page 36, focuses on research into the habits of these supreme desert hunters.

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The majestic and graceful whale shark visits the north-west of Western Australia each year and is fast becoming a major tourist attraction. What does the future hold for the world's largest fish? See page 28.



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