NEW LABORATORY FOR BIRD DIET RESEARCH

Bird watchers and researchers have a new facility from which to study the hundreds of thousands of birds that migrate from the Arctic tundra to Western Australia's Kimberley coast for the Australian summer.

The new facility is a 'wet lab'—built with the help of a $37 000 grant from the Lotteries Commission's Gordon Reid Foundation for Conservation—at the Broome Bird Observatory in Roebuck Bay, 15 kilometres from the Kimberley coastal centre.

It was opened and named the Pearson Wet Laboratory, by Observatory Chairman David Pentelow in December, 1996 in honour of Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) Woodvale Research Centre Manager Grant Pearson. Mr Pearson had been the driving force behind the establishment of the laboratory, to promote the study of invertebrates (on which the birds feed), in the Broome estuary mud flats. He designed and supervised its construction to meet the needs of researchers and bird watchers, and had been instrumental in securing financial assistance for the project.

The laboratory will become the centre for a range of research studies involving CALM scientists, members of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union and international centres such as the Netherlands Institute for Sea Research.

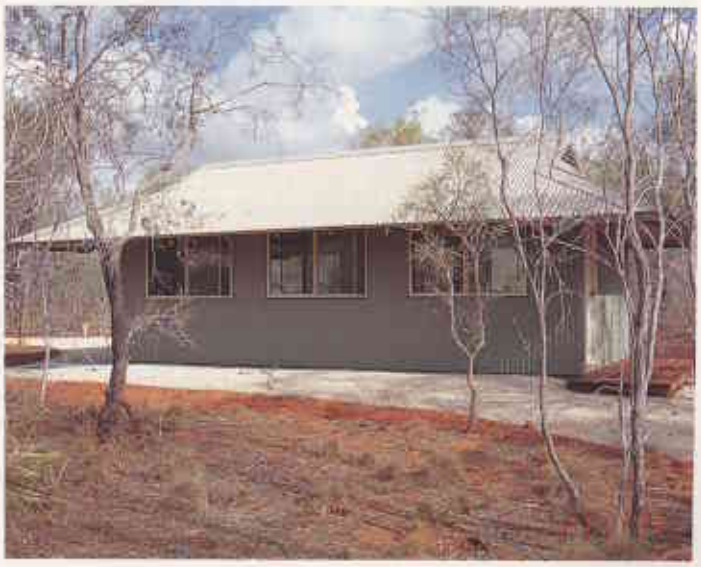
The Broome Bird Observatory has been operating since1988. It has hosted a number of major expeditions by the Australasian Wader Study Group to trap and band several thousand migratory shorebirds. Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach, to the south, are the first Australian landing sites for many of these birds.

Research has focused on developing information about numbers and species, roosting sites, migration routes and management issues. The new wet laboratory will enable this research to be expanded. Last year, a community-based pilot project began to monitor the invertebrates that live on the bottom of the bay. This pilot is the basis for a major collaborative study by CALM, the Broome Bird Observatory and the Netherlands Institute for Sea Research in mid-1997.

Mr Pearson said that both the pilot study and the collaborative project heralded a new era for studies of wading birds in the north-west of WA and Australia generally.

"The completion of the wet lab will enable scientists, volunteers and interested visitors to work in a relatively comfortable, safe and adequately equipped facility," he said.

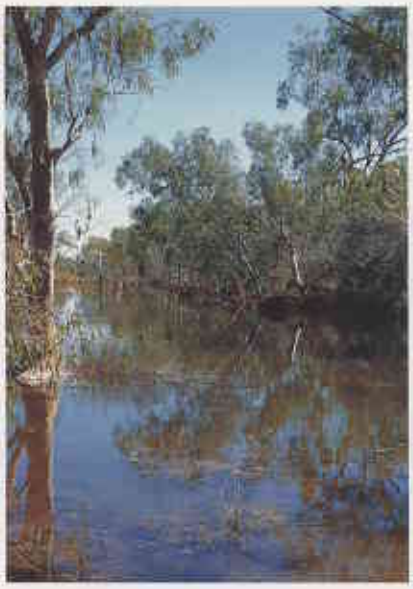
"We are also planning to extend research into areas such as wader diets and the makeup of the sedimentary layers of the bay."



Top right: *Wet lab interior. Photo - Grant Pearson*

Centre right: *Volunteers testing cross-country snow skis as a means of rapid transport across mud flats at remote sites at Roebuck Bay. Photo - Grant Pearson*

Right: *The new wet laboratory is, airconditioned, and has plenty of light. Photo - Grant Pearson*



LANDSCOPE

VOLUME TWELVE NUMBER 3, AUTUMN 1997

Aquatic bugs are helping scientists to determine the health of WA's waterways. See Spineless Indicators on page 49.

CALM's new Marine Conservation Branch gets in deep (page 10) to play its vital role in safeguarding the health of WA's unique marine environment.

Called 'Karlamilyi' by desert Aborigines, Rudall River National Park (page 28) is steeped in history and bristling with wildlife.

The economic, social and conservation potential of Acacia in WA , a story of a golden future on page 16.

Fancy a walk? Join us while we look at the environment, history and building of a new Bibbulmun Track. See page 36.

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

The tiny pebble-mound mouse of the Pilbara (see story on page 42) is a tireless night-worker and the architect of many odd, red gravelly mounds, which look like miniture volcanoes among spinifex.

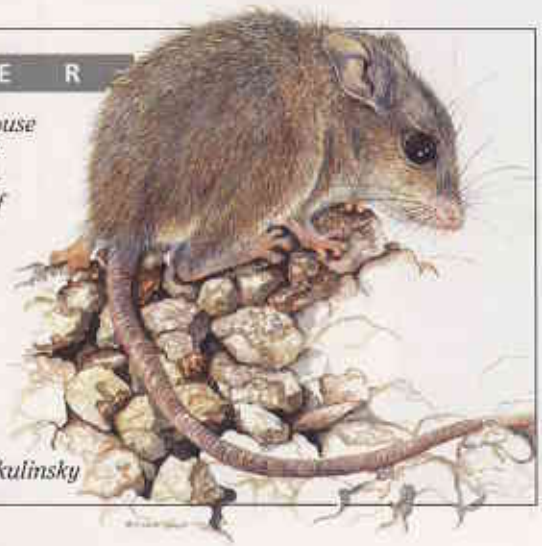


Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky

Managing Editor: Ron Kawalilak
Editor: David Gough
Story Editors: Verna Costello, Mitzi Vance, John Hunter
Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Ian Abbott, Paul Jones and staff of CALM's Science & Information Division
Design and production: Maria Duthie, Sue Marais
Finished art: Maria Duthie, Sue Marais, Gooitzen van der Meer
Illustration: Gooitzen van der Meer, Ian Dickinson
Cartography: Promaco Geodraft
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (09) 334 0296 Fax: (09) 334 0498
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (09) 334 0481 or (09) 334 0437
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Department of Conservation and Land Management,
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