



ENDANGERED



THE NIGHT PARROT

How do you conserve a species that has not been seen alive by any living ornithologist, and of which only two unequivocal sightings have been made this century? First, find your bird. Then locate a population to be studied and managed. But finding this elusive bird is not easy.

Since the publication of a leaflet seeking reports of sightings of night parrots in mid-1995 (see 'Bush Telegraph', *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 1995), about 30 reports have been received. On the basis of these reports, apparently suitable habitat has been searched at five locations in the southern Goldfields and eastern Wheatbelt in the last 12 months or so. Field work included a major 1996 camp-out in the Lake King area by Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) staff and volunteers from the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU). But despite about 70 vehicle hours of spotlighting and a similar amount of daylight searching, night parrots remained unseen.

Adding recent reports to historical

ones suggested that the remote area between Nullagine and Newman, in the west, and the Canning Stock Route, in the east, merited investigation. In particular, we had received a rather convincing report from the Canning Stock Route, dated 8 June 1996, which was almost in the middle of a cluster of three historical reports.

An expedition to this area was conducted in November 1996. Those involved were John Blyth, Allan Burbidge, Jim Rolfe, and Peter Kendrick (all of CALM), Walter Boles (Australian Museum, Sydney) and volunteer Allen Savage. The expedition was largely funded by CALM, with assistance from the 'Dick Smith Night Parrot Fund', managed by the Australian Museum.

We assumed, on the basis of reports in the literature, that night parrots visit waterholes at night during hot weather. We concentrated on mist-netting, listening and

spotlighting around isolated waterholes at six sites, either at or close to previous sightings.

Field activities were mostly at night—not just to escape the heat, but because the bird is thought to be nocturnal. One or more tape recorders were run for the first four hours after sundown at each place of surveillance. During the day we searched for possible hiding places for night parrots and for feathers.

Unfortunately, there were no signs of the bird, either visible or audible. This was disappointing, but not unexpected. The night parrot is a secretive, well-camouflaged nocturnal bird, living in remote places in habitats that are potentially available across half of Australia. All the indications are that it is very uncommon and highly threatened. If we do not find and manage one or more populations, this bird may just fade away to extinction. We will continue the search. If you believe you have seen a night parrot, please contact your nearest CALM office.

By John Blyth

Illustration by Judy Blyth based on W.T. Cooper's illustration in *Australian Endangered Species*, with permission.

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

OCEANS OF WEALTH
CHRIS SIMPSON, NICK D'ADAMO AND CAROLYN THOMSON.....10

AUSTRALIA'S GOLDEN FUTURE
BRUCE MASLIN.....16

PARK FOR THE PEOPLE
CARIS BAILEY.....23

RUDALL RIVER NATIONAL PARK
DAVID GOUGH.....28

BUILDING A BETTER BIBBULMUN TRACK
JESSE BRAMPTON.....36

MOUND BUILDERS OF THE PILBARA
STUART ANSTEE, TONY START AND KEITH MORRIS.....42

SPINELESS INDICATORS
MIKE SMITH, WINSTON KAY, ADRIAN PINDER AND
STUART HALSE.....49

REGULARS

IN PERSPECTIVE.....4

BUSH TELEGRAPH.....6

ENDANGERED THE NIGHT PARROT.....27

URBAN ANTICS.....54

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 miniature volcanoes among spinifex.

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 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.
 Visit **LANDSCOPE** Online on our award-winning Internet site **NatureBase** at <http://www.calm.wa.gov.au/>
 Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director
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 50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia