

NOISY SCRUB-BIRD RETURNS TO DARLING RANGE

One of Western Australia's rarest animals, the noisy scrub-bird, has been reintroduced into bushland in the Darling Range, where it was first discovered 150 years ago. The birds were captured and relocated from Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve, where they are thriving. Their reintroduction into this part of their historical range is taking place in two stages, with this release of several males being the first stage, and the release of up to 10 females in June 1998 being the second stage.

The noisy scrub-bird (*Atrichornis clamosus*) is a small (34–55 g) bird that inhabits low forest and dense scrub. It is semi-flightless and feeds primarily among leaf litter and debris on the ground. In the breeding season it eats mainly ants, beetles and spiders. It is known and

named for its characteristic loud resonant song, which is used to mark and identify territory.

Well-known zoological collector John Gilbert discovered the noisy scrub-bird at Drakes Brook in the Darling Range in November 1842, while collecting specimens for ornithologist John Gould. This area has long been associated with the noisy scrub-bird, and a memorial to the species and to John Gilbert was erected at Drakes Brook by the WA Historical Society in 1948.

The species disappeared from the Darling Range soon after European settlement, and was thought to be extinct until its rediscovery by the late Harley Webster, Albany Primary School headmaster, in 1961 at Two Peoples Bay near Albany.

CALM Executive Director Dr Syd Shea said the reintroduction of the noisy

scrub-bird into this part of its original range highlighted the success the Department was having with native species recovery plans under its conservation initiative *Western Shield*.

"Since the rediscovery of the noisy scrub-bird three decades ago, comprehensive scientific research has gone into ensuring the conservation of this unique and historically important native bird," he said.

"CALM has successfully undertaken a number of steps to increase the species' population in the Albany region from approximately 100 birds in 1961 to around 1 200 in 1997, with a view to eventually expanding its current range into other areas. The reintroduction of several individual birds into the Darling Range is a milestone and a significant step towards achieving this."

The site of reintroduction,

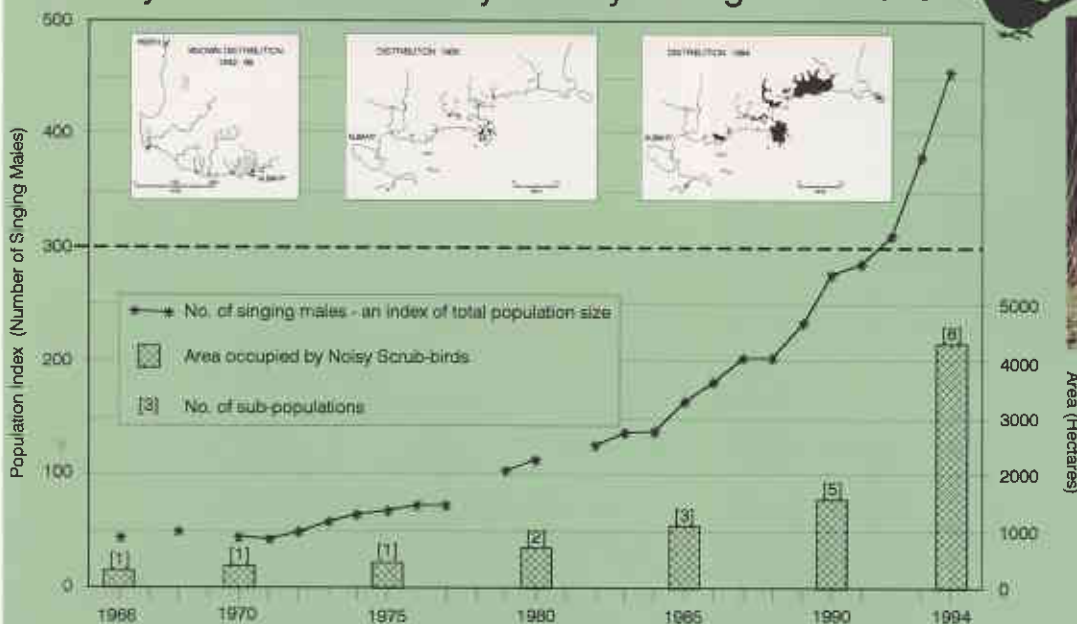
between the Murray Gorge and the Harvey Dam on the outskirts of Alcoa's Willowdale mine site, is a prime location as it provides the required stream habitat vital for the bird's survival, and is not affected by bauxite mining.

Extensive research and site surveys were conducted last year to determine the best place for reintroduction. The area chosen is typical of the environment where the species was originally discovered last century.

Once reintroduced, the birds will be the subject of a comprehensive monitoring program, undertaken both by CALM and Alcoa, which will include the use of radio-tracking equipment.

Alcoa has donated \$10 000 towards the monitoring program of this first release, and has played a vital part in helping secure a prime location for the release.

Noisy Scrub-bird Recovery: Albany Management Zone



The Noisy Scrub-bird was rediscovered at Two Peoples Bay in 1961, 72 years after it was last recorded.

- Recovery Plan Objectives:**
1. Achieve and maintain more than 300 singing males in the Albany zone.
 2. Establish additional populations within a western management zone.



Noisy scrub-bird.

Photo – Babs & Bert Wells/
CALM

LANDSCOPE

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Europeans brought alien plants and animals to WA's rangelands, which have since become degraded. What can be done? See p. 42.



One of the best aids to plant conservation is completely invisible. See our plant DNA story on p. 18.



How old is the Stirling Range? Read about this stunning area in our story on p. 48.

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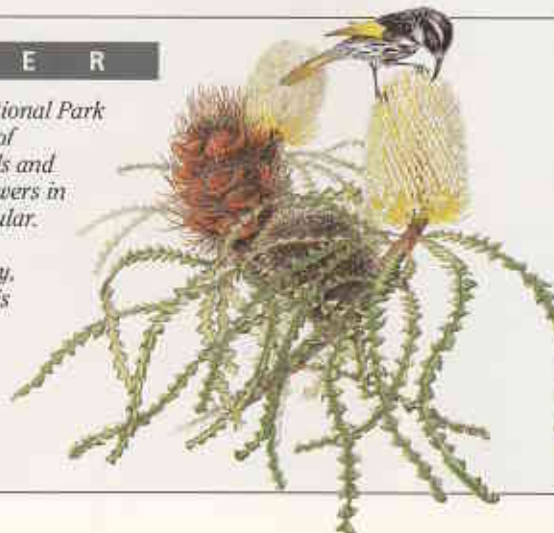
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COVER

The Fitzgerald River National Park boasts a startling array of habitats, mammals, birds and other species. Its wildflowers in spring are often spectacular. Our story on p. 28 is a fascinating tale of variety, beauty, and threat in this aged land.

Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



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