

MONTEBELLO RENEWAL PROGRESS

Montebello Renewal is part of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's (CALM) *Western Shield* program, which aims to control feral predators and re-establish native species. Phase 1 is the eradication of feral black rats, which occurred on nearly every one of the 180 islands, islets and rocks in the group (see *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 1996-97). Phase 2 is the eradication of the feral cats that occur on Hermite Island, while Phase 3 is the re-introduction of locally extinct species and, possibly, the introduction of threatened species from the mainland.

Phase 1 was a major project lasting from late May to early September 1996, involving more than 40 people, of whom at least eight were at the Montebellos at one time. Some 11 000 bait stations (plastic bottles with holes cut in their sides) were laid on a 50-metre grid over all larger islands, with smaller islands, islets and rocks being treated with plastic bags of bait laid from a helicopter and by boat. Over two tonnes of Talon G rodenticide were laid in all. Phase 1 was funded by CALM, the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry and Energy, and major sponsors who included West Australian Petroleum, Apache Energy, ACI Plastics Packaging, Crop Care Australasia, Australian Customs Service, Pilbara Regiment Australian Army, and Selleys Chemical Company. Volunteers were crucial for this labour-intensive project and 24 people, mostly CALM staff, gave up some of their holidays to work at the Montebellos.

Two trips were made to the islands by CALM staff in 1997. The first was from 14 to 18

March. Personnel were Peter Moore, Fran Stanley, Peter Kendrick and Bob Taylor, all from CALM's Pilbara Region. They were transported to and between the islands by the Australian Customs Service Vessel *Andrew Fisher*. They searched for tracks and other signs, and found small numbers of rats on Primrose and Crocus Islands. On both islands a number of bait stations were found to be empty. Both were re-baited with fresh bait during the March visit. No sign of rats was seen on any of the other islands.

The second trip was from 14 to 31 July 1997. Personnel were Fran Stanley, Mick Sermon (Pilbara Region), Phil Fuller and Andrew Burbidge (Woodvale Research and WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit). Transport to the islands was on the Australian Customs Service Vessel *Charles Kingston*. Transport back to Karratha for the two Pilbara Region staff was by helicopter, courtesy of Woodside Petroleum, and return transport for the two Perth staff was by helicopter to Barrow Island and jet to Perth, both courtesy of West Australian Petroleum.

During this visit, lines of Elliott traps were set for several nights on a number of islands. Bait stations laid in 1996 were checked to ensure that they still contained bait. No rats were trapped and no rat sign was seen on any island. No empty bait stations were found, except on Crocus Island, and these had been replaced in March.

No evidence was seen that native animals were eating the Talon rodenticide laid in 1996. Of the two grain-eating birds occurring in the Montebellos, bar-shouldered doves were considerably more common in 1997 than in 1994,



Top: *Hermite Island, Montebellos.*

Above: *CALM service boat Pseudorca II with Alpha Island in background.*

Photos - Andrew Burbidge

Right: *Baited bottle, showing signs of having been chewed by a rat.*

Photo - Jill Pryde

1995 or 1996. Brown quail have never been frequently observed, but were noted on several islands during July 1997. Birds of prey, including white-bellied sea-eagles, ospreys, brahminy kites and

kestrels, were at least as common as in past years. Reptiles were also common in July, with bungarra, or sand monitor (*Varanus gouldii*), tracks plentiful on all islands on which they occur.

# LANDSCOPE

VOLUME THIRTEEN NUMBER 1, SPRING 1997



*The threat from below . . . How can we defeat our greatest environmental enemy? Read about salinity and what we can do about it on p. 10.*



*Dryandra, one of the last refuges of the native wildlife. Now you can experience this woodland wonderland for yourself. Find out how on p. 36.*



*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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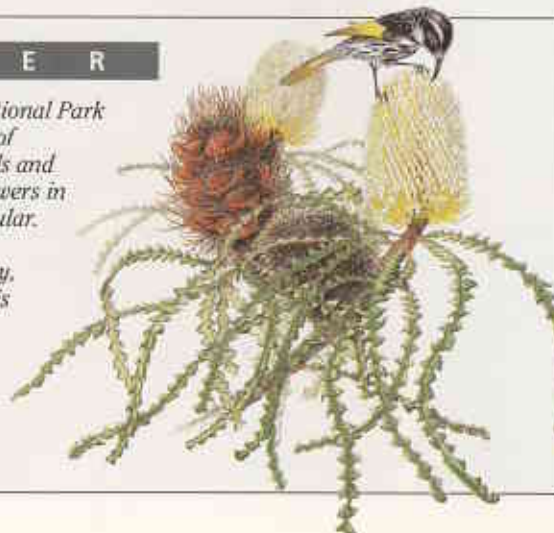
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## COVER

*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*



**Executive Editor:** Ron Kawalilak  
**Managing Editor:** Ray Bailey  
**Editor:** David Gough  
**Story Editors:** Mandy Clews, Verna Costello, Carolyn Thomson, Mitzi Vance  
**Scientific/technical advice:** Andrew Burbidge, Ian Abbott, Paul Jones, Keith Morris 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 ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498  
**Subscription enquiries:** ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437  
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